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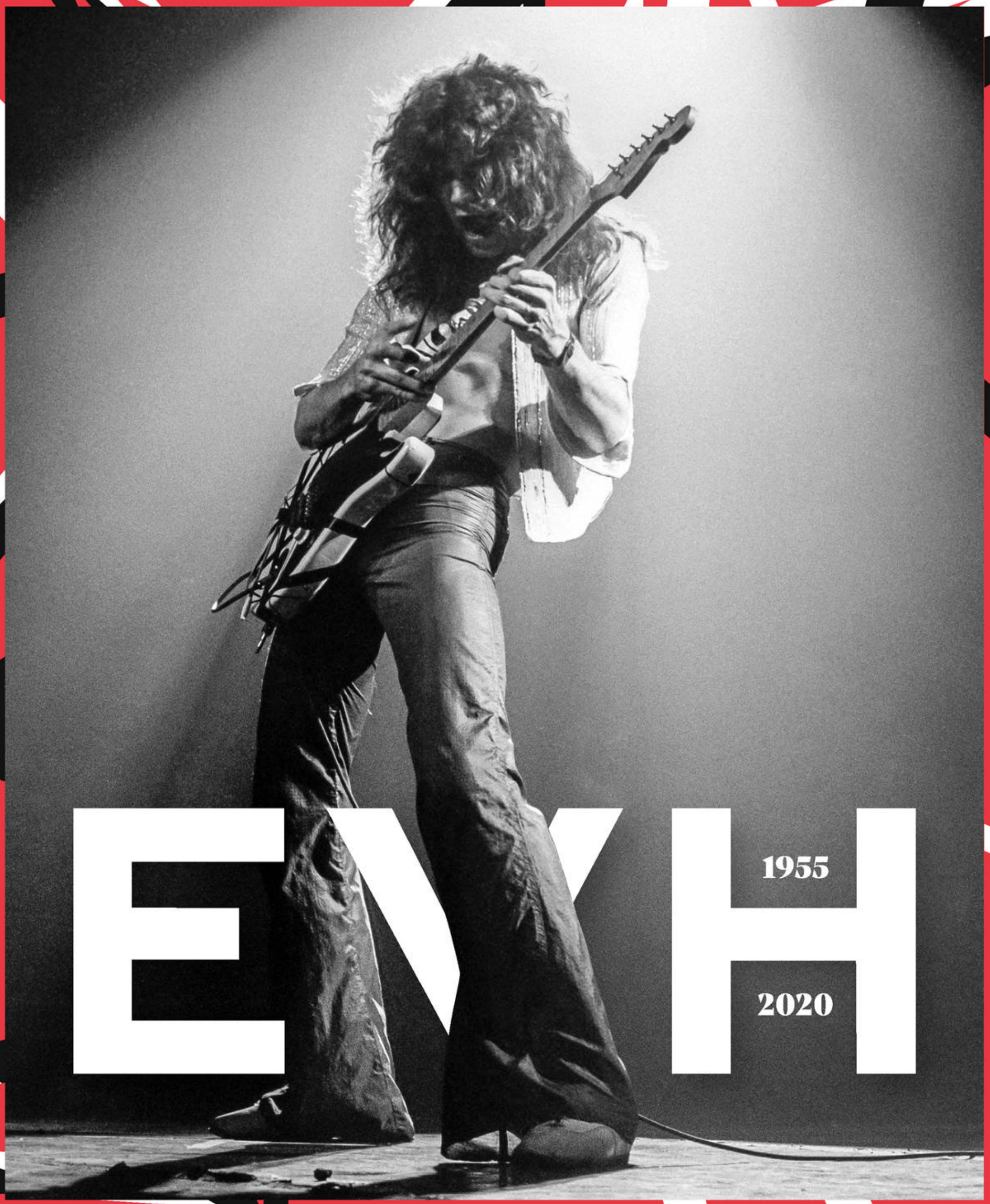
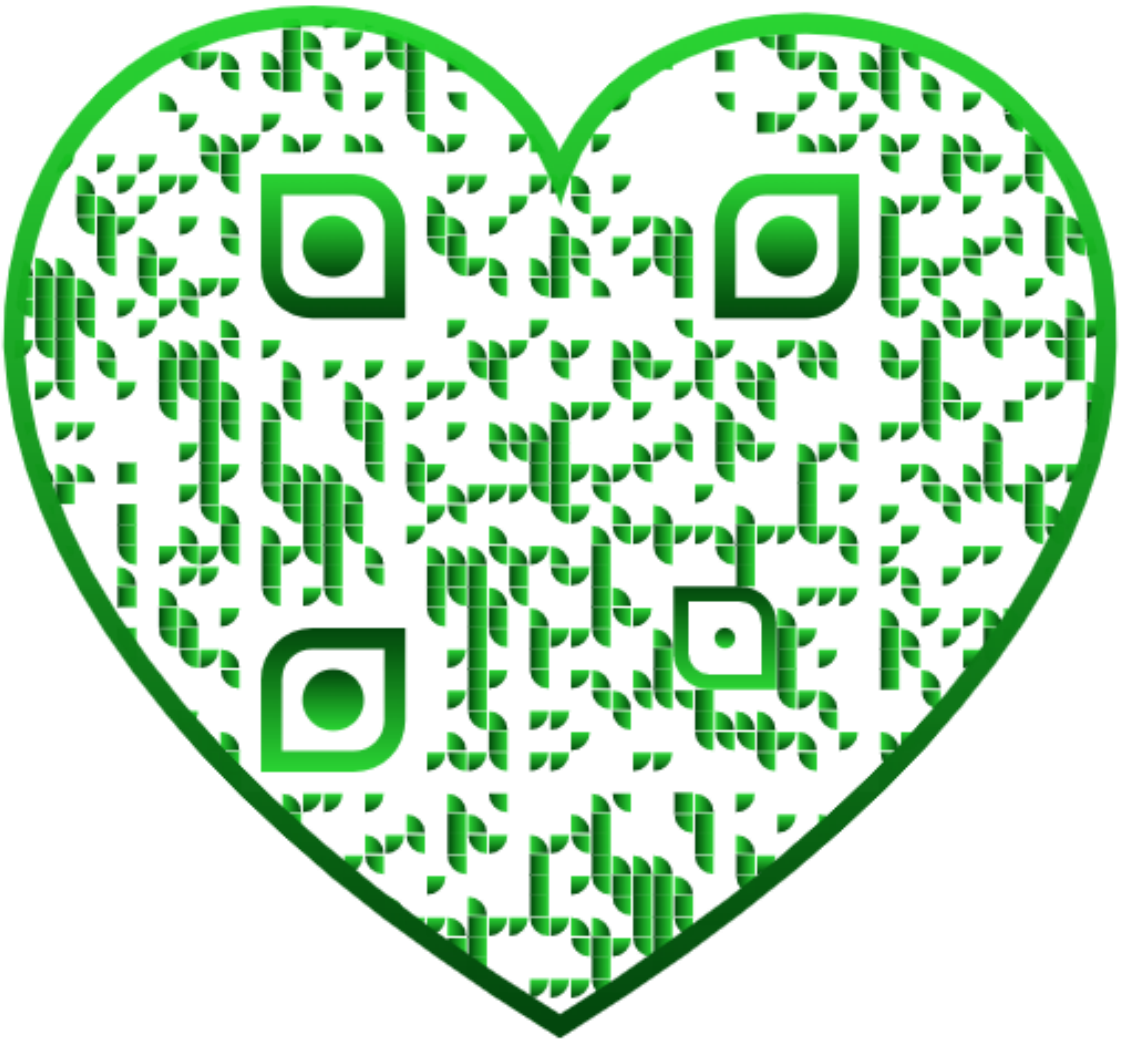


EVH

1955

2020



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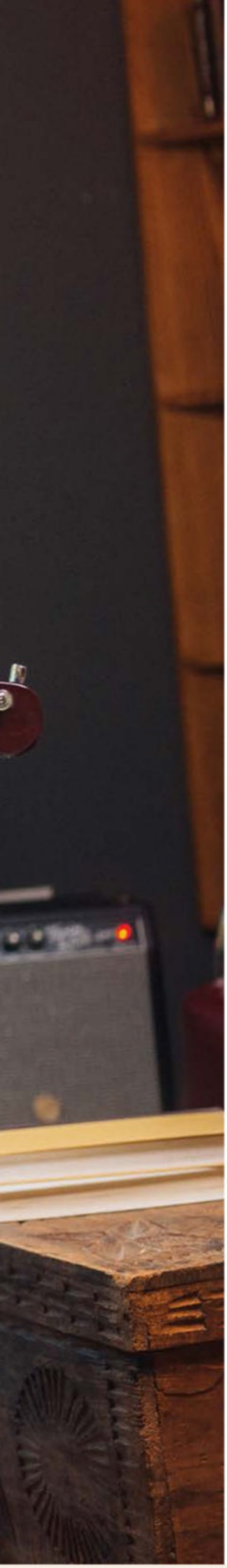

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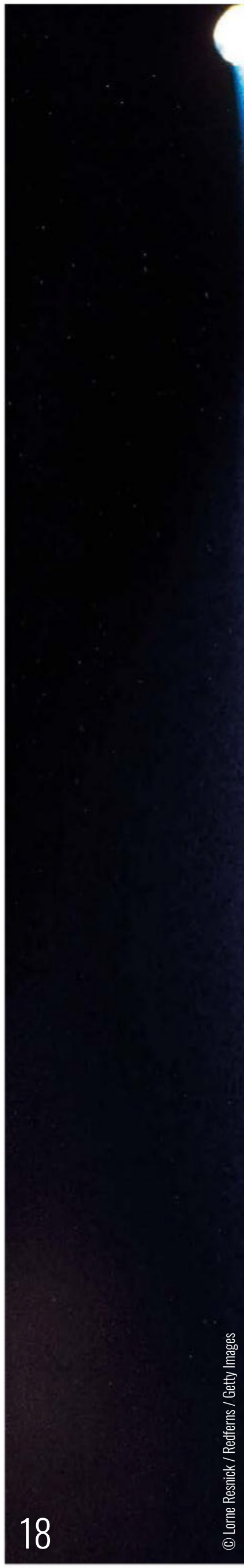
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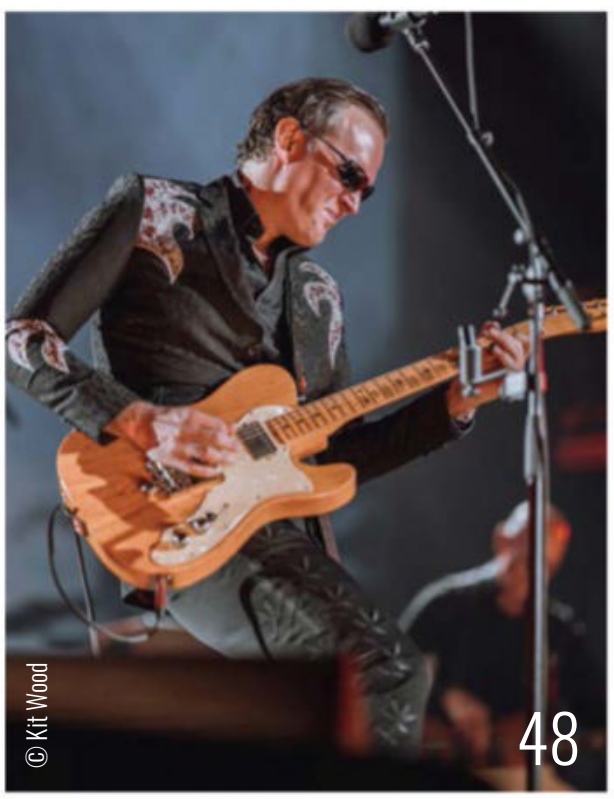
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EDITOR'S LETTER

BLAZING A TRAIL

There's no question that Eddie Van Halen was one of the Mount Rushmore figures of the electric guitar. Like Jimi Hendrix before him, EVH reimagined what it was possible to achieve with six strings, a whammy bar and magnetic pickups. And he didn't just change the way people played the instrument or the tones they chased – Eddie Van Halen changed the way people designed and built guitars and amplifiers too. In this issue, we celebrate the life, the legacy and the career highlights of one of the greatest of all time from p18 onwards.

Elsewhere, we sit down with Joe Bonamassa and Bernie Marsden to lift the lid on Bernie's contribution to Joe's new album, recorded within the hallowed walls of Abbey Road Studios. We also find out how Les Paul connoisseur Bonamassa rates The Beast, the fabled 1959 Les Paul Standard with which Marsden wrote and recorded Whitesnake's biggest hits. It's an unforgettable guitar but there's much more to Bernie's collection than just The Beast. This month, the legendary blues-rocker also gives us a tour of the remarkable array of vintage acoustics he has accumulated over the years.

The Abbey Road connection continues as we head back to the home of the most famous pedestrian crossing in St John's Wood to catch up with Idles, fresh from a livestreaming performance from Studio Two. The Bristol rock band's live shows are some of the most ferocious around and they might be the only artists in the history of this magazine to arrive for a photoshoot with a guitar that was smashed earlier that day. Enjoy the issue. I'll see you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
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Cover photograph © Fin Costello / Redferns / Getty Images

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

FIRE BRAND

Just loved everything about the November issue, particularly the wonderful Gibson Custom Firebirds. I have a 1990 Polaris-turned-custard Firebird V and a 1966 Firebird 1 with a dodgy white refin. It all started with seeing Johnny Winter on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* – and here we are! People always ask me which shape is my fave and, while I love the look of the reverse, the P-90s on the non-reverse are just amazing. Even if they're not quite as good as my Telecasters!

CAMERON MACKENZIE, VIA EMAIL

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

There was an interesting letter in the November magazine about seeing Sieve Marriott in a Denmark Street store trying a few Les Paul guitars. This reminded me of when I was a working at Roost guitar amplifiers in the mid-1970s and someone brought a late 1960s 100-watt Marshall Plexi head – which was once owned by Steve Marriott – in for a service. Ron, the owner of Roost, had worked on this amp and he sagely told me that this amp was "a beast". I can still clearly remember Ron putting the amp on the test bench and plugging the amplifier into the test speaker underneath, turning the volume to maximum and then playing a tatty ol' Les Paul through the ol' girl (after it had blown me across the room – but that's probably a story for another time!)

After we'd played, it Ron turned to me and said, "This might be the loudest and best-sounding Marshall I've ever heard". I couldn't help but agree. Looking back, this would have been one of the fabled 'hot' Marshall heads from the '60s and early '70s, and has been my reference for what a Marshall 100-watt head should sound like ever since! An incredible thing.

TERRY BATEMAN, VIA EMAIL

LEFT-FIELD

Imagine my shock reading in your recent Hendrix feature that, "Despite playing guitar left handed, Hendrix actually wrote with his right hand". What's so surprising is that Jimi was using his strongest hand (the one he wrote with) to hold down the strings on his guitar, with his left hand doing the strumming/picking. But this is totally logical. So why are we right-handers deemed to be playing guitars left handed, and overlooked by many guitar manufacturers?

PAUL TURNER, VIA EMAIL

Cameron's 'birds of a feather

SCORES ON THE DOORS

I always find the reviews section of your magazine very informative and detailed. However, everything is either given a nine or a 10 out of 10. This makes it difficult to differentiate between products, and the good and the bad. I feel like some reviews aren't at all critical and it feels as though these are sponsored ads.

GEORGE MATTHEW, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for getting in touch, George. While it's evident even from this issue that not everything we review gets a nine or 10, this is certainly a subject worth addressing. There's a huge amount of new guitar gear being released every month – far more than we could fit in the magazine or even review comprehensively online. As a result, we focus on choosing the best new gear to review, rather than devoting space to products that are less than inspiring. That said, our reviews are still rigorous (and independent) and even when we give something a glowing write-up, we hope you'll notice that we've drawn attention to any drawbacks that you should be aware of. You can rest assured that if we recommend a product, you can purchase it with confidence, forearmed with the expert opinions of some of the best and most knowledgeable reviewers in the business.

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ONES TO WATCH

PANIC SHACK

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

With Radio 1, BBC Introducing and NME all excited about the Cardiff band, we meet Panic Shack guitar player Romi Lawrence to talk rejecting labels, borrowed gear and synchronised swimming

What inspired you to pick up the guitar?

"We're pretty new to guitar playing. Emily has played bass in another band for a few years so she's our 'real' musician. As for myself and Meg, we're new to it. We've basically been teaching ourselves to play since we decided we were going to properly form this band – so little more than a year. I guess it came down to being fed up of complaining that there aren't enough female guitarists and putting our money where our mouth is. "

Tell us about your main guitar and pedal setup.

"I play a Squier Tele through a distortion pedal and a Blues Driver, and an old amp that used to belong to Dave [Bassey, drums]. Meg [Fretwell] uses a Squier Strat, a distortion pedal, a chorus pedal and again, a borrowed amp. Emily [Smith] plays a Fender Precision (borrowed from her dad, because her Squier wasn't cutting it), a fuzz pedal and whatever amp she can get. This setup is, of course, temporary until we get our Fender endorsement."

You say you formed the band to counter the growing feeling of music becoming even more elitist and closed off to working-class people. How do you hope to inspire that change?

"We hope that just pushing as hard as we can to exist in this sphere will inspire more girls, especially those from working-class backgrounds, to have a crack at it. When we were younger, all you saw were men in guitar bands so it didn't cross our minds that it could be something that we as girls could ever do. If us being a band that other girls can look to and be inspired to pick up an instrument or write a song by, then we've done our jobs. In terms of guitar playing, it can be intimidating to put yourself out there when you don't necessarily feel like a guitarist, especially when you're backstage with a load of guys who are amazing guitar players. We've learnt over the past year that music is about conveying a message.

From left to right: Sarah Harvey, Emily Smith, Romi Lawrence and Meg Fretwell. Not pictured: Dave Bassey

It's about making sound. Music is subjective and you don't need to be shredding solos until your fingers bleed to write amazing songs. Just look at The Slits."

What do you sound like and what's interesting about your approach to playing guitar?
"Our approach to playing guitar is interesting because we can't really play. Jokes aside, I think as a band we're pretty unusual, because we don't have all that much technical knowledge. We basically chuck a few notes together that sound good and go from there. In regard to what we sound like, because the songs are quite bass heavy, we've been compared to bands like ESG and Delta 5, which we're completely fine with. We're big fans of both."

What's your most memorable gig so far and when can we see you play next?
"For all of us, our most memorable gig was the headline show we performed just before lockdown. It was amazing to sell out downstairs in [Cardiff venue] Clwb Ifor Bach and see people arrive wearing our T-shirts and shouting our lyrics back to us. It felt like all our hard work over the previous year had come to fruition."

***I Don't Really Like It* represents a slight departure for you in terms of sound compared to your previous singles. What inspired that?**
"After the release of our first single, we were quickly labelled a punk band. But, in reality, all of our songs have a very different vibe. In terms of relaying messages, we remain pretty consistent. But musically our songs are diverse, as you'll keep discovering."

The single is generating significant airplay. How does that impact a band on the up like yourselves?
"We've had the belief in ourselves from the very beginning that we could accomplish a lot as a band and that's what we credit our success to. Even though we're incredibly grateful for the responses we've had so far, nothing has really changed for us because we knew we'd be able to achieve what we have achieved. We still manage to fit our heads through the door though, if that's what you're wondering."

You've worked continuously with Tom Rees of Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard. What does he bring to the table when you're composing and recording?
"We went to Tom in the early days of the band and asked for a bit of advice about the music business, as we'd seen Buzzard go from strength to strength over the years and we wanted nothing less for us. When it came to us wanting to record, it was a no-brainer that we'd go into the studio with Tom. We were – and still are – quite new to recording, the studio and everything that goes with that process. But we were never made to feel anything but comfortable in the studio. We recorded 10 songs in five days just before the lockdown struck. There was no stress, lots of laughs and we felt completely at ease, which is very much our vibe."

With three singles already in the bag, is there a full-length record on the horizon?
"All we can say is that you ain't seen the last of us and that big things are coming. But our lips are sealed."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
"After countless world tours, we'll probably have settled into our Hollywood mansions. Panic Shack will remain at the top of every chart worldwide and we'll eat caviar every meal. Meg will be running for president. Sarah [Harvey] and Harry Styles will be expecting their third child. Emily will reside in her cat sanctuary. I'll be back in rehab and Dave will be playing in a Beatles cover band... We haven't really given it much thought to be honest."

Tell us something interesting about yourself that has nothing to do with guitar.
"As well as writing music together, we're all part of Cardiff's first mixed-sex synchronised swimming team. It's crazy but it's true."

Panic Shack's latest single *I Don't Really Like It* is out now

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

BLACK STONE CHERRY
THE HUMAN CONDITION

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The Kentucky band on their guttural riffery, triple-tracked guitars, embracing 'English' chord work and tackling the human condition

Recorded and produced at bassist Jon Lawhon's Monocle Studios in Kentucky, *The Human Condition* is Black Stone Cherry's seventh full-length album, with the tracking finished merely days before lockdown measures were imposed. On their new LP, the band detail the struggles and their adaptations made to life in 2020, revealing that "there was a real urgency and fear of the unknown during those sessions". Here, Ben Wells discusses his five favourite guitar parts on the record, plus his love of octave pedals and a Martin that seems to appear on every LP they compose.

AGAIN

"This shows off the 'Enforcer' guitar, as we call it. It's an extra guitar that we put up the middle in most songs on the album. Usually, there are two rhythm tracks on each song: one side is me, one side is Chris [Robertson]. For the heavier songs or songs where we feel like the intro and choruses need to jump out more, we add the Enforcer and put it in the middle. It's adds extra beef where it's needed but can be very important. We also used a Nash Tele, a T-63 modelled after the '63 Tele, and a custom-built Lucky Dog Telecaster."

IF MY HEART HAD WINGS

"The solo in this track is one of my favourite ones Chris plays on this album. It stands out perfectly with this song and has great melody. It reminds me of classic ballad Aerosmith – and I love it. The start of the lead line follows the melody of the vocal in the chorus and I love when solos do that. To me, it just continues to stick that melody out there, certain songs call for great melody in a solo, compared to just burning up the fretboard. When you can marry the two together, it becomes like Journey – and again, we love that."

PUSH DOWN AND TURN

"The bridge here is one of my favourite instrumental sections on the album. It's so intense and heavy. It was challenging at first for us all to play it perfectly tight with each other because it goes heavy with this galloping-style rhythm. I remember Chris going first and it was a little more challenging because he had nobody else to play off. It was quite easy for me because I love those big metal riffs that chug. Because it's a riff that required us playing very tightly together, we didn't know if the bass would clutter it, just because of the natural low end. We had Jon holding a single note, pumping the low note and also playing it high. He nailed it and played the riff right with us. Once we all got it, everybody's forearms were burnin'."

KEEP ON KEEPIN' ON

"I believe the acoustic guitar parts on this record are really great. On this album, I used my Martin D-42. That guitar is so beautiful and big-sounding. It has become the BSC acoustic on the past few albums. It doesn't have electronics so the microphone and mic placement is key. It's fun to play one side acoustic with standard chords and then alternate versions of those chords on the other side. We call them 'English' chords, where you might play a G but in a totally different position so you get the ring and clarity of different strings."

DON'T BRING ME DOWN

"This song is already great so we didn't do anything to change that. All we wanted to do was make it more BSC. Chris and I both used octave pedals and played the whole song with that effect. We love octave pedals, so it was cool to finally record with both of us using them. I used an MXR Sub Machine and he has a signature fuzz octave called Dos Fuzz coming out soon. When two guitars are playing with an octave pedal, you must make sure to set the effects differently so the guitars complement each other. Otherwise it would be a big mess and wouldn't sound good. There's a bit of science to matching the sounds."

The Human Condition **is out now on Mascot**

© Mike Rodway

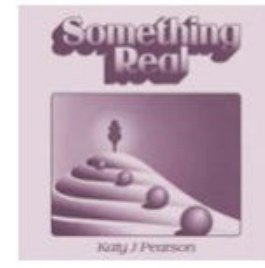
This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD
Straws In The Wind

Single number three of this calendar year from the Aussie psych-rock band is another acoustic number that uses microtonal guitars and sits neatly alongside their work on 2015's *Paper Mâché Dream Balloon*.

NORTH AMERICANS
Furniture In The Valley

An intimate and beautiful record in its entirety, new North Americans LP *Roped In* features esoteric and intricate guitar work from Patrick McDermott, elevated by fragile field recordings and William Tyler's harp.



KATY J PEARSON
Something Real

The latest single from the Heavenly artist opens with a simple guitar pattern before blossoming in the second chorus with a lovely descending riff. The final chorus, with its added brass section, is pure bliss.

KURT VILE & JOHN PRINE
How Lucky

One of the late, great John Prine's final recordings, this duet is a poignant take on Prine's 1979 song. Vile described the recording process as "probably the single most special musical moment in my life".

MATT BERNINGER
One More Second

The latest single from The National frontman's stellar solo offering opens with a percussive fingerpicking pattern that's lovingly counterpointed by his signature baritone vocal.

FLEET FOXES
Can I Believe You

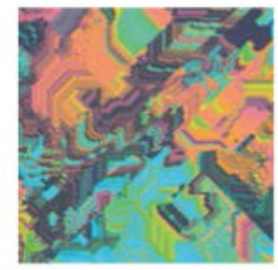
Now with an accompanying video directed by frontman Robin Pecknold's filmmaker brother, Sean, the clean, driving guitars and orchestrated vocals here create a heady, positive sensitivity.

LITTLE BARRIE & MALCOLM CATTO
After After

Little Barrie's collaboration with Malcolm Catto is an atmospheric thrill ride with dark undertones. Find out more next month as we visit Barrie Cadogan and Malcolm Catto in the London studio where this record was made.

IDLES
War

On the opening track of their third album, the Bristol rock band double down on their message of unity, with monstrous riffs, powerhouse drumming and guitar work reminiscent of Fugazi.



PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS
Tally-Ho

An introduction to their forthcoming album, Tally-Ho is a fuzzed-out belter from the get-go, with octave fuzz aplenty, galloping rhythms and more offsets than you can shake a short-scale neck at.

EMMY THE GREAT
A Window/O'Keeffe

Written in 2018, new album *April/月音* marks Emmy The Great's travels to her birthplace of Hong Kong and boasts singing bowls, prayer bells and Buddhist percussion, plus superb arpeggiated guitar.

VAN HALEN
Jamie's Cryin'

We couldn't let this month's Playlist pass without encouraging you to dig into EVH's catalogue and remember his genius. Often overlooked in the context of Van Halen's stunning debut, this is a real gem.

PLINI
I'll Tell You Someday

Four years on from his debut album, Plini has unveiled the lead single from the follow-up. This song offers a glimpse into its inner workings, with jazz-infused lead lines interspersed with breakbeat drums.

WIN! A WALRUS AUDIO JULIANNA

WORTH £225

The big sister to Walrus Audio's Julia chorus/vibrato pedal, the Julianna promises players all the same flavours but with precious new textures and added functionality.

Boasting a purple enclosure adorned with more surf-green artwork courtesy of illustrator Adam Forster, this is a stereo chorus/vibrato that Walrus calls "Deluxe". Why? Well, it comes with the customary depth and rate controls you'd expect but the depth knob hides a secondary function, Drift, which can speed up and slow down the rate of the LFO. The lag knob allows you to set the centre delay time that the LFO modulates around, and the final knob, D-C-V, is a blend from your dry signal through chorus to vibrato.

For a more exploratory look at the Julianna's abilities, read our review on p104. For a chance to win one, answer the question below. Good luck!

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A) 2001 **B)** 2011 **C)** 2018

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HE CAME

HE SAW

HE REINVENTED ELECTRIC GUITAR PLAYING

EDWARD VAN HALEN

1955-2020

WORDS MICHAEL LEONARD

In the modern world, it's inevitable that everything is reduced to bits and bytes. Hence we've seen the mainstream media reduce the late Edward Van Halen's legacy to *Jump* and *Beat It*, with the occasional bit of *Eruption* if we're lucky. All rock landmarks, of course. But a partial snapshot of the man's gargantuan talent. EVH deserves better.

It could have been very different. He may have never even picked up a guitar. Alongside older brother Alex, Edward Lodewijk Van Halen took piano lessons as a child as his parents moved the VH clan from their home in the Netherlands to California in the US. "We came here with approximately $50 and a piano," Eddie later marvelled. "We didn't speak the language. Now look where we are!"

The starting pistol blew when the brothers heard The Dave Clark Five's *Glad All Over* and The Surfaris' *Wipe Out* – in short, rock 'n' roll! The piano was binned, and with new instruments young Edward was to be the drummer, Alex the guitarist. Eddie was busy delivering newspapers (to pay for his drum kit) when Alex sneaked onto the throne. But the brothers eventually agreed to swap instruments.

It was a good call: they both became incredible with their respective tools. Eddie quickly became obsessed with six-strings. He'd spend hours and hours in his teenage bedroom practising guitar. Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton were his idols. But he also heard other things in his head – things that had never been heard before.

After bar-band apprenticeship under the name Mammoth, the band Van Halen scored themselves a now legendary demo session with Gene Simmons. Kiss's self-styled God of Thunder wanted to change the band's name to Daddy Longlegs but they refused. Simmons bowed out of any further involvement after his own Kiss management said Van Halen "had no chance of making it". It could have been *very* different indeed.

By the time the determined Van Halen's debut LP of sparkling rock arrived, that insistence of sticking to their name proved justified. Not since Eric Clapton's time with The Yarbirds, the Bluesbreakers and Cream in the 1960s had a band received so much attention due to their guitar player – and Eddie didn't even sing, except for the odd chorus backup. Band and brand were nevertheless in harmony.

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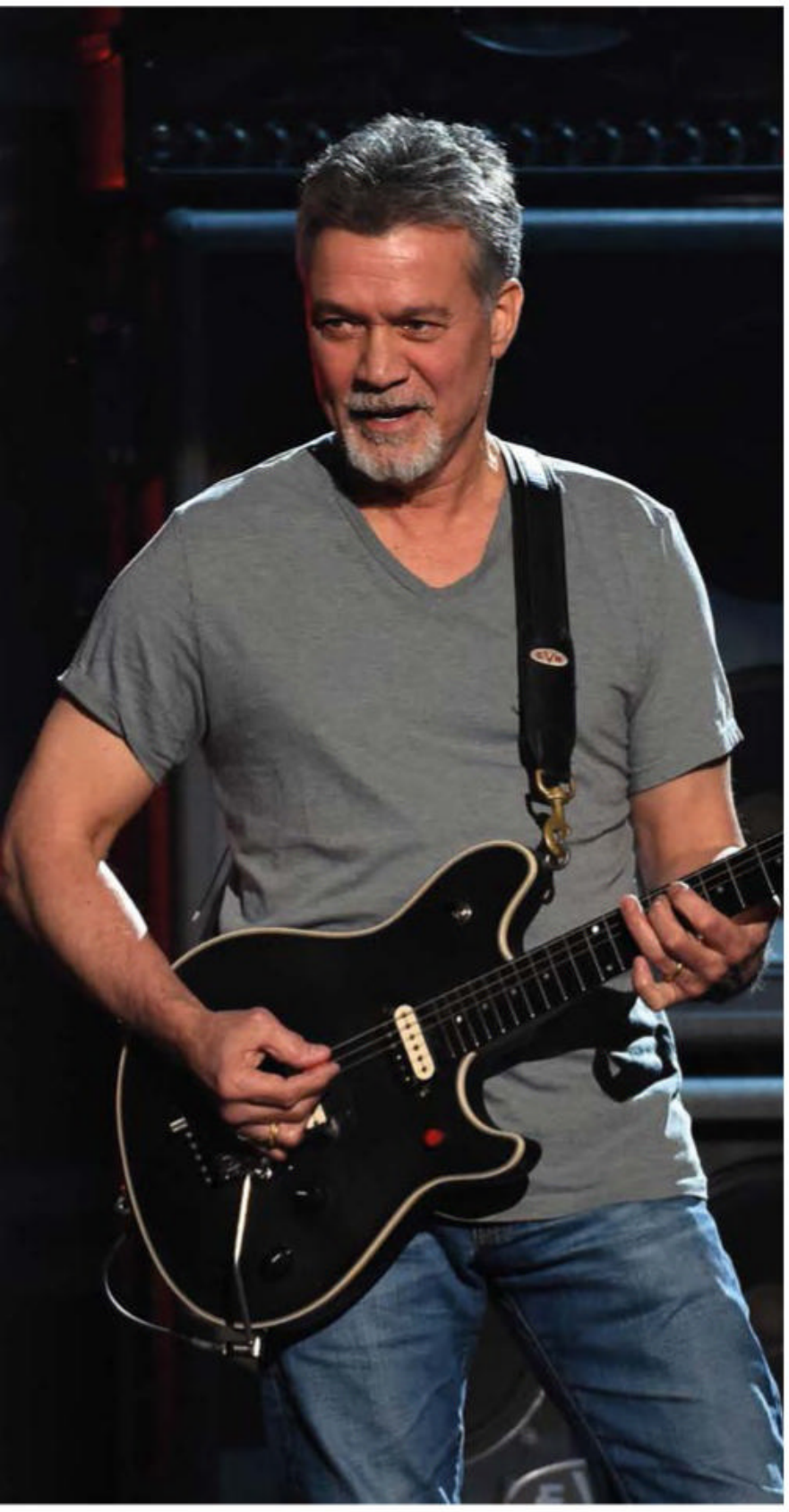


FACING PAGE David Lee Roth and EVH performing live at London's Lewisham Odeon in 1978

LEFT Eddie performing at the Billboard Music Awards at Las Vegas's MGM Grand Garden Arena in 2015

The shreddingly-tapped *Eruption* got all the WTFs but there was much more than that. *Runnin' With The Devil* boasted a swaggering and sleazy riff and had a melodic solo that exploded like fireworks. *Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love* is gold: both heavy and weightless, with a riff of concrete and another soaring solo.

Van Halen II repeated this new heavy blueprint. *Eruption* became *Spanish Fly*, a bamboozling showcase of two-handedness on a nylon-string, perhaps just to show that the first hadn't been a fluke. It's been written many a time that Van Halen helped "kill disco" but that's barely true anyway. Early Van Halen is big, dumb, grinning glitterball music. You can dance to it too. It's metal disco, with guitars as lasers.

When times were good between the Van Halens, perma-yelping David Lee Roth and bassist Michael Anthony, the hits just kept a-rollin'. Every release had something that would see 1980s guitar players' jaws hit the floor: there was the goofy speed-metal riffology of *Loss Of Control* and the phase-pedal-as-instrument on *And The Cradle Will Rock*, both from *Women And Children First*; the darkness of the whole *Fair Warning* album, with bomb-riff *Unchained* and the flanging funk figures of *Push Comes To Shove*; the volume-knob-as-pick of *Cathedral* and the insane stacatto picking of *Little Guitars*, both from *Diver Down*. The list is long. It's become a cliché to say that Eddie Van Halen's rhythm guitar playing outshone his solos but you know what? Eddie Van Halen's rhythm guitar playing *did* outshine his solos. His palette of colours was way beyond 'metal', impish grins and tapped solos, crowd-pleasers though those moves inevitably were.

Others soon picked up the baton. It's perhaps unfortunate that Van Halen inspired a slew of by-rote 1980s hair metal acts (which will remain unnamed to protect the guilty) but Eddie himself was undoubtedly the most influential guitarist of the decade. There were serious debates during the 1980s about who was better, Jimi or Eddie? Hendrix won but only by virtue of being first through the door.

When David Lee Roth left, the band arguably became more workmanlike with Sammy Hagar at the helm but that didn't halt commercial success. Eddie could still deliver indelible songs, and from *5150* in 1986 to *Balance* in 1995, Van Hagar scored back-to-back US No. 1 albums.

All the while, Eddie remained devoted to the simplistic wood, wire and metal that made up his electric guitars. He had thousands of players aping his own "brown sound" tones. He described his own modded and self-designed instruments as the pursuit of a "Formula 1 racing car". In time, signature guitars, amps and pedals would all bear his name, as would a whole manufacturing company (ignoring the fact that his original Frankenstrat was a $130 Charvel factory second body and neck, with a Gibson PAF pickup that was wax-potted at home by EVH himself).

The commercialisation of the EVH brand was perhaps futile – an official Van Halen guitar will never get you in the head of Edward Van Halen, which was clearly a strange place to be. He wasn't a craftsman in the traditional sense. He could never read music. He never 'studied'. He rarely talked about the artists who inspired him. He was a true maverick, a savant who intrinsically understood how best *he* could play guitar but a human being who struggled with the more mundane aspects of life.

It's sad to see Eddie Van Halen go so relatively young, as he probably could have played anything on a guitar. His father Jan was a jazz musician and *Diver Down*'s *Big Bad Bill (Is Sweet William Now)* was a throwaway hoot: Ed comp-chording an old Gibson jazzbox beside Papa VH on a clarinet. Eddie could surely have made a jazz guitar album. It would probably have reinvented jazz. But he mostly stuck with the heavy rock template by his own choice.

EVH's most fervent fans called him "the Mozart of electric guitar". That might sound lofty but Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart himself once said, "I pay no attention whatever to anybody's praise or blame. I simply follow my own feelings." Remind you of anyone?

EDWARD VAN HALEN GEAR INNOVATOR

EVH's playing was pushed boundaries but his unique approach to gear was equally revolutionary in the 1970s and beyond. His endless pursuit of perfection saw him refining for the next 40 years – and changing the industry along with it

WORDS TONY BACON

Eddie Van Halen didn't just amaze his fellow guitarists with the remarkable work he did and his rare combination of playing techniques. Eddie's attitude to his guitars and his amplification also influenced a multitude of musicians, as well as instrument makers and amp builders.

"I hate store-bought off-the-rack guitars," he told Jas Obrecht at *Guitar Player* back in the late 1970s, a few months after the first Van Halen album had appeared. "They don't do what I want them to do." This statement summed up the approach Ed would take to more or less all the gear he used during the years of his growing success.

He'd started out on a cheap Teisco electric but some of his mates in early pre-VH bands thought that the Strat he moved to sounded too thin and the ES-335 didn't look rock 'n' roll. So he decided to take matters into his own hands and combine some of the qualities of Fender and Gibson units into one home-assembled instrument. Enter the Frankenstrat, Ed's generic name for several lashed-together guitars that he built from assorted parts.

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

As with many things Eddie Van Halen, the stories have varied throughout the years. But it seems likely that the first Frankenstrat, the one with the black-and-white finish seen on the front of that first Van Halen album cover in 1978, consisted of a Strat-style body and neck he got from Charvel, supplied to Charvel in turn by Boogie Bodies. He took the PAF humbucker from his ES-335 and fitted that to the body, slanted at the bridge. He glued in some jumbo Gibson frets, screwed on his Strat's vibrato and fitted a single control for volume.

Then there was that distinctive black-and-white finish, which Eddie achieved using acrylic bicycle paint. He began by spraying on a white base before sticking down strips of masking tape apparently at random and then spraying black over everything. When he removed the masking tape, it revealed a natty striped effect that would be reworked for later red, black and white Frankenstrat models. It also came to define the band's iconic aesthetic.

The Frankenstrat served Eddie well. In 2011, when he donated Frankenstrat 2 to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, he told the museum's magazine what became of its predecessor. "I retired it from regular use," he said. "It took so much abuse from endless touring and recording. I wanted to pay some respect to it and let it survive and not let it get destroyed completely. At the same time, it became something so well known beyond my wildest dreams that its value made it a target for theft, and I wanted to protect it. I still play it every now and then. It's priceless to me."

The next step in the story of Eddie's individually styled guitars came thanks to an endorsement deal he made with Kramer in 1983. The tie-up would help propel Kramer to become the biggest-selling electric guitar brand in the US during the mid-1980s. Though, in its original form, the company eventually burned out and barely survived into the following decade.

EVH surveying his guitar collection – which included Strats, Frankenstrats, Les Pauls, and a double-neck Gibson EDS-1275 – from atop his Echoplex

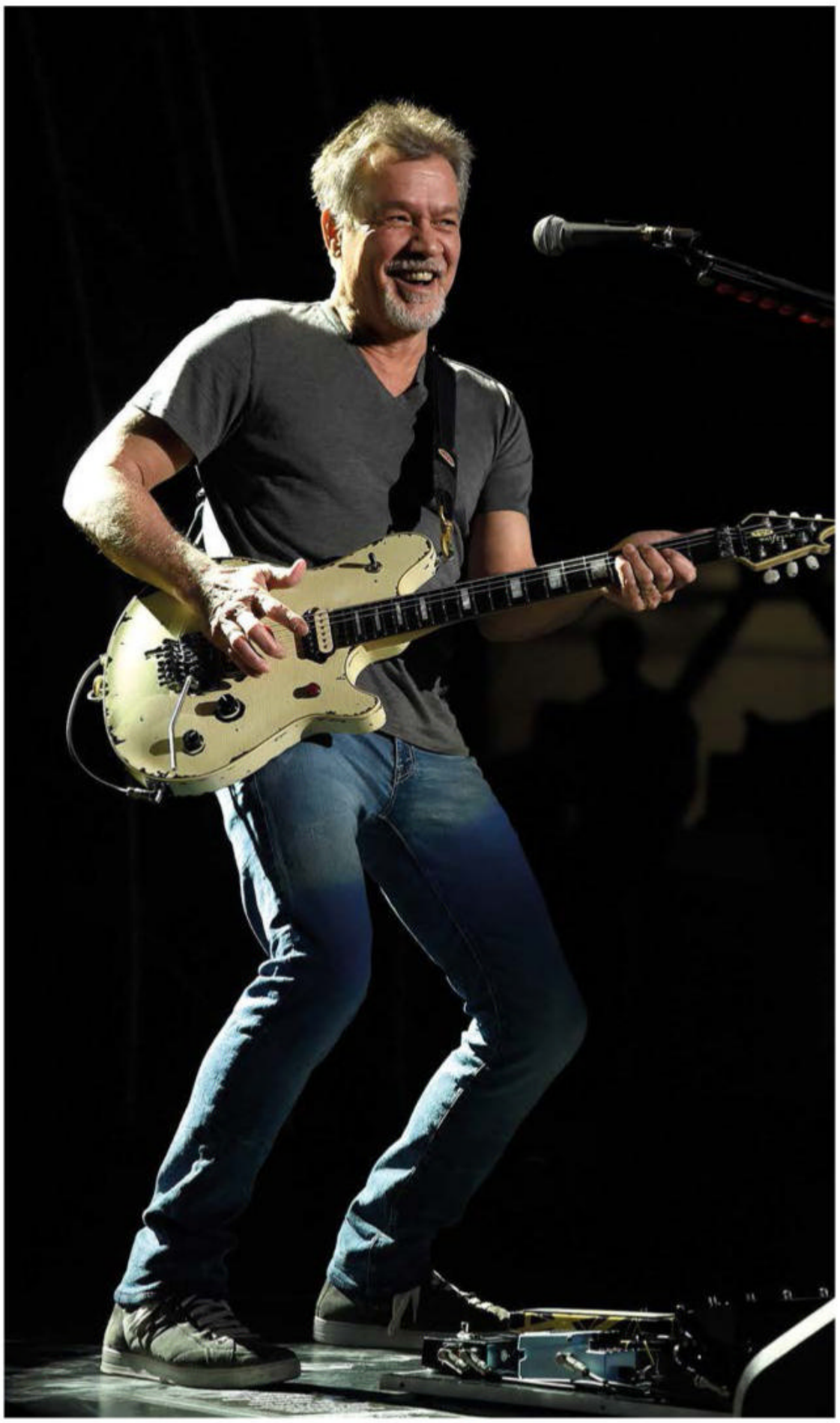
As well as the production models he promoted, Eddie's most famous Kramer was a new take on the Frankenstrat, usually called the 5150 thanks to the taped numbers on its body that matched the name of EVH's studio. The guitar had a Kramer Pacer Special body and a custom maple neck with a hockey-stick head, like that on Eddie's modded Ibanez Destroyer. It had the familiar set of straightforward appointments: single bridge humbucker, single volume control, Eddie's now favoured Floyd Rose vibrato system and a striped red-white-and-black finish.

Eddie's do-it-yourself attitude was hardly new. Players had chopped and changed guitars to suit their requirements for years. But his choices paralleled a growing affection among makers for mixing Fender and Gibson attributes, as well as the rise of the superstrat, the extreme rocker's tool of choice that developed throughout the 1980s thanks to Kramer, Electra/Westone, Jackson, Ibanez and others.

SEARCHING FOR THE BROWN SOUND

If you find EVH's early guitar history confusing, wait until you get to his amps. If you're seeking some cold hard facts, look away now. About all we can say with a hint of certainty is that, for those crucial early recordings, Eddie used a 1960s Marshall Super Lead JTM100 Plexi with one or two Marshall cabs. Live, he used more Marshalls. Debate still rages as to whether or not the Marshalls were modified. The short answer? It depends what you call modified.

At first, Eddie relied on the services of technician Jose Arredondo. So if any mods were completed at that time – maybe a cascading gain here, an external dummy load there – they were probably done by Arredondo's hand. Some techs who serviced later EVH amps swear they were stock and hadn't been modded. The legend shows no signs of becoming clearer, and hasn't been helped by Eddie's own mischievous muddling when discussing his gear.



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It seems safest to consider Eddie's earliest comments on the subject, in that interview with Jas Obrecht just after the first album in 1978, as his most reliable. He spoke then about Arredondo, about the four "very old" Marshalls he had, and about the way Arredondo would "beef them up". EVH thought that Arredondo put bigger transformers in his Marshalls and that he used a Variac box to change the voltage going into his amps. Variac is a brand name that is applied generically to a transformer that adjusts the level of mains voltage going into an amplifier. Many have since noted the potential dangers of this practice.

"The amp's only supposed to take 100 volts," Eddie said of the US mains feed. "But you crank the thing above that, like to 130 or 140 volts, and the tubes really glow." In the '78 interview, he said he'd lost those original Marshalls, reporting that on stage he used three 100-watt tops "of whatever make – right now I'm using Music Man, a couple of Laney amps, which are English, and a couple of new Marshalls," along with two similar sets of back-ups.

Then there's Ed's "brown sound", which was his description of the results he wrung from his original set-up of an MXR M-117 flanger, an MXR Phase 90 phaser, an Echoplex tape echo and his Marshall amps (and, of course, the minor matter of Eddie's head, hands and heart). "There is a difference between being just loud, and having what I call a warm, brown sound, which is a rich, toney sound," Eddie told Obrecht in a later interview in 1980. "I can actually play so loud on stage that you won't hear anything else but I don't really like to do that. I like to get a balanced sound."

Something of a cottage industry has grown in recent years for boutique amps that celebrate the timeless attributes of the early Marshalls, and the mythology surrounding Eddie's brown sound has certainly contributed to that trend. Dave Friedman at Friedman Amplification is one of the makers most concerned with the modern interpretation of the classic British amp circuits and tones, and he's been in the business long enough to have seen it all. "To me, the quintessential amp is an old Plexi Super Lead circuit with a Variac, set to 10," he told Dave Hunter in this publication earlier this year. "That's where my head is, which is quite gainy if it's set up right but it's old-school gainy. You know, more the Van Halen school of Plexi, shall we say."

Eddie would continue his quest for the amp sound he was always chasing, brown or otherwise. In later years, he teamed up with Peavey for his first series of 5150 amps, starting in 1992. More recently, there were his various EVH amps, in collaboration with Fender, which kicked off in 2007 with the 5150 III. "What else do I have?" he wondered aloud in that '78 chat. "I can't even remember. I've got so many different heads! I've just got to patch them all together and hope it sounds cool. It's working out pretty good."

THE WOLFGANG COMETH

In later life, Eddie worked with several guitar companies to produce a sequence of signature models based on a design he called the Wolfgang, named after his son. The first sighting came in 1991 with the Music Man Edward Van Halen model, following EVH's endorsement in the mid-1980s of Ernie Ball 5150 strings, and Music Man's own introduction of its Silhouette guitar and Steve Morse signature model.

Dudley Gimpel, who designed the Silhouette, teamed up with Eddie, and the result marked a distinct change from the earlier Frankenstrat and Kramer instruments. Working from EVH's original sketches, they developed a basswood body with a flat maple top, a single volume control, and a neck-end wheel truss-rod adjuster. The vibrato was a Gotoh-licenced Floyd Rose with a hardtail option, and Steve Blucher at DiMarzio helped create a custom pair of pickups that convinced Eddie to finally go twin.

The guitarist used an amber flame-top example, one of the earliest prototypes, as his main guitar for several years.

Eddie switched to Peavey in the mid-1990s as his deal with Music Man ended (although Music Man continued to produce a very similar guitar without the EVH association, the Axis). Jim DeCola was the supervisor of guitar design engineering at Peavey, where he'd been since 1988, and Jim and EVH developed prototypes that moved on from the Music Man template.

The production Peavey Wolfgang introduced in 1996 added contouring for the maple top, pushed the neck deeper into the body, featured carbon-fibre reinforcement rods in the neck, recessed the truss-rod wheel into the end of the neck, and had a new headstock with Eddie's idea for a V element matched to Jim's scooped tip in a classic Peavey shape. The pickups were based on those of the Frankenstrat units, a tone control was added alongside the volume, and the vibrato was a Ping licensed Floyd Rose, with a D-Tuner on the low E string.

Eddie split with Peavey in 2004, and another revised Wolfgang became part of the line of products for that Fender-related EVH brand, the deal following a run of Eddie's Art Series guitars around 2004 with the Fender-owned Charvel brand. The first sign of EVH guitars came with a limited-edition remake of Ed's Frankenstrat. Then the brand's new take on the Wolfgang appeared in 2009, developed with Chip Ellis at Fender.

Agreeing to a set of pickups developed in-house at Fender, EVH was still unsure if the placement was exactly right. "I didn't have a router with me to enlarge the pickup cavity on the day we decided to look into that," says Chip. "So Ed went into his garage and grabbed a crowbar and a hammer. We went out in the driveway and he basically chiselled this huge pocket so we could move the pickup around in it. If you look at pictures of he Number 4 prototype on Eddie's '07/'08 tour, it looks like a dog chewed the pickup cavity. But it did the trick. We ended up moving it a 32nd of an inch, and found the sweet spot."

Since the first EVH Wolfgang in 2009, variations on the theme were added alongside, including set-neck and hardtail models, and cheaper guitars made offshore. "I seem to always be refining the design," Eddie told *The Hub* in 2017. "I'm constantly putzing around with it. You go on tour and you realise what works and what doesn't. It's an endless pursuit."

Eddie Van Halen never stood still when it came to his guitars and amps. And more often than not, he did it all with a smile on his face. He rarely appeared to take himself too seriously. "I never really sit down and practice," he said in 1978. "Like, shut myself in a little room and go, 'Alright, I'm serious now'. You know, I just sit around and then, whenever I get bored, I play my guitar." G

FACING PAGE TOP Eddie performing with his EVH Wolfgang at New York's Jones Beach Theater, 2015

FACING PAGE BOTTOM EVH posing with his signature Music Man model in 1991

ABOVE Van Halen rocking the New York Palladium, 1979, complete with all the rackmounted Marshalls you could ever need.

LEFT Eddie ripping into his Ibanez Destroyer at London's Lewisham Odeon in 1978

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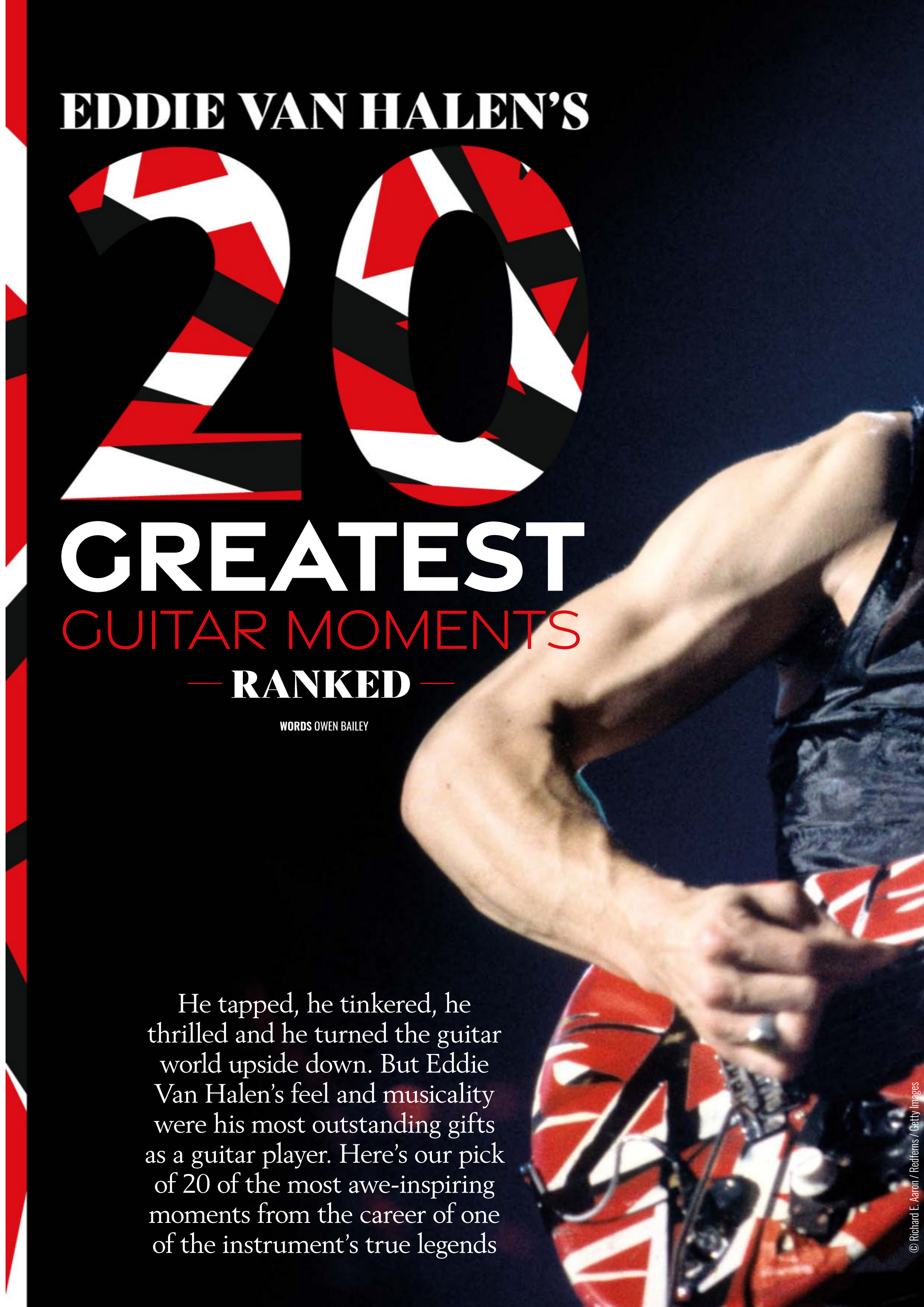
EDDIE VAN HALEN'S 20 GREATEST GUITAR MOMENTS — RANKED —

WORDS OWEN BAILEY

He tapped, he tinkered, he thrilled and he turned the guitar world upside down. But Eddie Van Halen's feel and musicality were his most outstanding gifts as a guitar player. Here's our pick of 20 of the most awe-inspiring moments from the career of one of the instrument's true legends



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Like Clapton, he became a household name. Like Hendrix, he expanded the frontiers of the instrument he played. Like Stevie Ray Vaughan, he contributed a world-shaking guest solo that crossed genre boundaries. Like Brian May, he created his own tools to forge his own sonic path. And like Jimmy Page, he was able to weave expressive virtuosity into the bludgeoning riffery expected of a macho rock band.

Like all of these players before him, Eddie Van Halen redefined rock guitar according to a unique personal vision. When it became clear that this exciting player also took the modding of instruments and gear to a new level of DIY obsession – chainsawing through mahogany, swapping pickups, perfecting the whammy bar… trying anything to move himself closer to the sound he heard in his head – it was only natural that he would inspire the superstrat craze and, in turn, legions of copycat players.

His band broke at an opportune time. With their succinct and hyperactive tunes, Van Halen brought the short sharp shock back into heavy rock, without sacrificing their musical aspirations. But from then on, they made their own luck. By 1984 and the album of the same name, they briefly but decisively ruled MTV and the airwaves.

Eddie Van Halen was the most pioneering guitarist to emerge since Jimi Hendrix and, like his life, his passing rocked the music world. Here, we present our own selection of 20 amazing guitar highlights, drawn from many, many more, to help remember him by.

18 ICE CREAM MAN

This 12-bar written by Chicago bluesman John Brim in 1953 begins conventionally enough, with David Lee Roth showing off his acoustic chops and delivering leery double entendres in his typically whiskey-soaked voice. But in the second half, we're treated to a rare glimpse of Eddie Van Halen the electric bluesman, as the guitarist rips into a solo that kicks off with wide-interval licks achieved via superhuman stretches before exploring the outer reaches of the blues scale, channelling trace elements of Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton through his hyperactive filter. EVH was a huge fan of Clapton. In fact, had he surfaced a decade earlier, perhaps a young Eddie would've opted to sling guitar for a blues band instead. It would've been a wild ride.

CRÈME DE LA CRÈME

Ice Cream Man was chiefly a showpiece for David Lee Roth, and was a song he'd been performing since before his Van Halen career began

17 SPANISH FLY

Van Halen II repeated the formula of the band's seminal debut but dialled the live feel and the charisma up to 11, probably since it was recorded off the back of the band's first world tour. But for his solo spot on the record, rather than attempting to recreate the seismic instrumental *Eruption*, Eddie stayed ahead of the copyists by turning in a turbocharged 60-second display of flamenco and classical-influenced acoustic virtuosity enhanced by two-handed tapping that revealed even greater depths to his paradigm-shifting style. He recorded the song using a nylon-string Ovation. It was originally suggested by producer Ted Templeman after he heard Eddie jamming on an acoustic guitar at his New Year's Eve party.

STARS AND STRIPES

The black-and-yellow Charvel nicknamed Bumblebee that graces the back cover of *Van Halen II* is buried with Pantera and Damageplan guitarist Dimebag Darrell, and was offered by Eddie in tribute to him

20 LIVE SOLO SPOT, LIVE WITHOUT A NET

Let's see EVH in his element. Van Halen concerts were almost an excuse for the part where the rest of the band would down tools to allow the crowd to worship at the altar of Eddie's guitar technique. He was among the pantheon of rock gods who could really make the solo spotlight count, as illustrated in 1986 concert video *Live Without A Net*. Topping out at more than 10 minutes, this solo is a stunning non-stop showcase of the idiosyncrasies of Eddie's abilities and his arena-filling tone. But among all the dive-bombing, harmonics and neoclassical tapping, it's also a reminder that the fundamentals of rock 'n' roll guitar underpinned everything he played. For the first generation of Van Halen fans, it's tough to watch this YouTube clip without mentally overlaying the tape wear from a worn VHS.

SLIPPING THROUGH THE NET

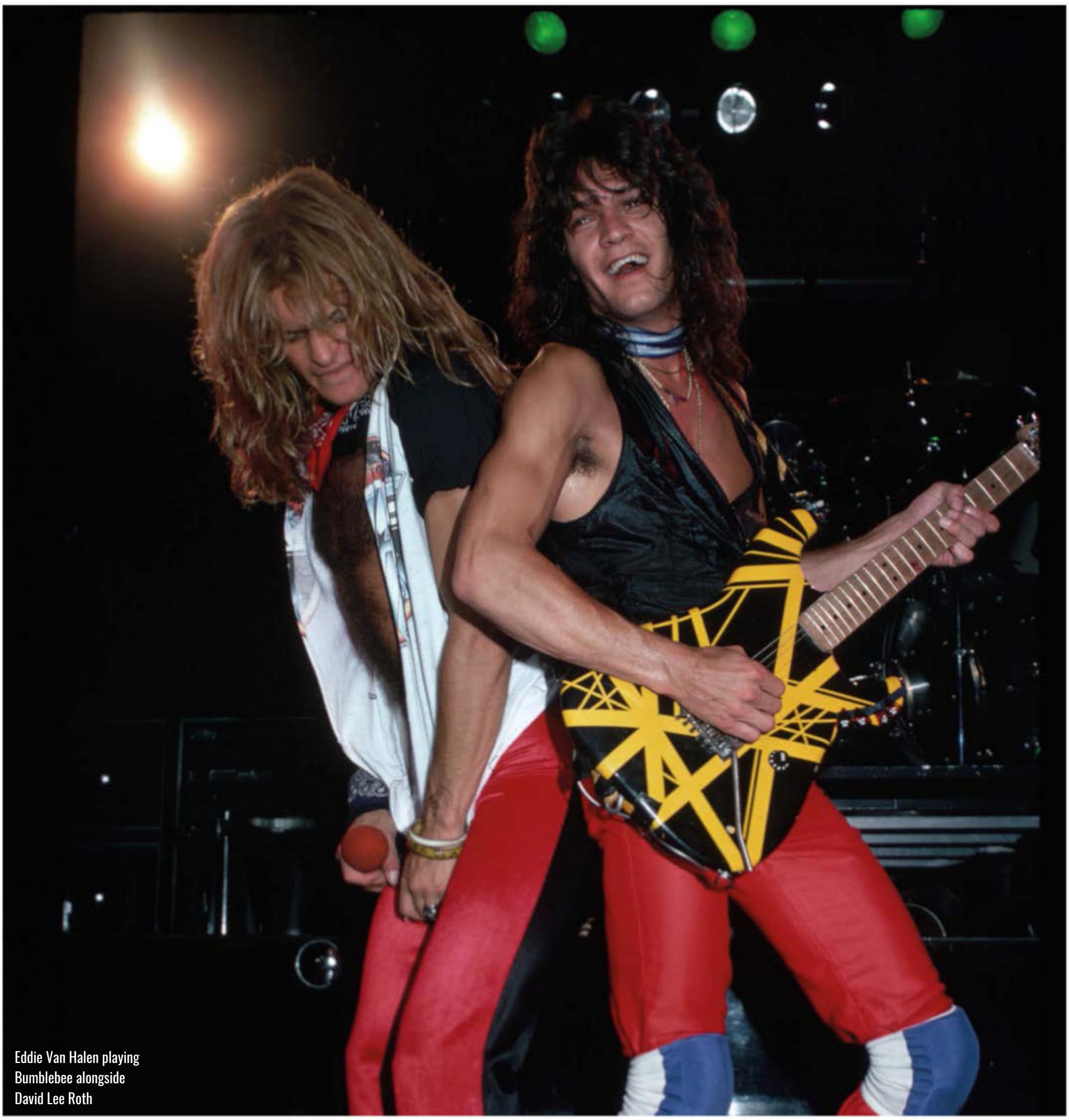
The recording of this live show was plagued with audio issues. Continuity errors in the edit of this solo spot result in the mysterious resurrection of Eddie's cigarette a few minutes in

19 POUNDCAKE

During sessions for *Poundcake*, the lead single from 1991's *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*, studio tech Ken Deanne left his Makita drill on the recording console. "He left the drill laying right in front of me as he was going to grab a replacement piece of gear," said Eddie. "As I'm sure you know, a guitar pickup is very similar to a microphone. I happened to grab the drill and, by sheer luck, it was in the same key as the song. So I asked Alex to start *Poundcake* again from the beginning and I used the drill over the pickup and scraped it on the strings for the intro. I also used it for a second or two during the song's solo." Naturally, the drill, set at 60 cycles, was stolen on the subsequent tour. But its whirling-dervish revving is the cherry on top of a song that features two tracks of electric 12-string among its Zepp-esque wall of sound.

DRILL BITS

Paul Gilbert also helped turn using electric drills on guitars into an artform: hear his powertool duel with bassist Billy Sheehan on Mr Big's *Daddy, Brother, Lover, Little Boy (The Electric Drill Song)*, also from 1991



Eddie Van Halen playing Bumblebee alongside David Lee Roth

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16 DROP DEAD LEGS

This stomping rocker from *1984* was inspired by *Back In Black*, with Eddie telling *Guitar World* that he thought of the song as almost a jazz version of the AC/DC classic. "The descending progression is similar," he said. "But I put a lot more notes in there." It begins with a Skynyrd-esque riff before the bait-and-switch, as the volume control is rolled up and one of rock 'n' roll's most swaggering riffs takes over. The outro solo is a departure from EVH's usual perfectionism and sees him follow improvised fragments of ideas wherever they lead.

GIVE 'EM THE FINGER

The swooning bends in the opening drop-D section aren't performed with the whammy bar. Instead, they're a mixture of string bends and finger-slides

15 ONE FOOT OUT THE DOOR

A continuation of the brooding atmosphere created by the unusual hybrid guitar-synth sound of *Sunday Afternoon In The Park*, the John Carpenter-esque horror show that precedes it on 1981 album *Fair Warning*, *One Foot Out The Door* is a far cry from Van Halen's most riotous and uplifting party tune. Yet it's a dark and intriguing development for the band's sound and, against such a menacing backdrop, Eddie lets his imagination run riot anyway, unleashing a pair of solos that string together some of the most unhinged and demonic licks of his career, including descending chromatic runs that seem to defy explanation.

ON THE FAST TRACK

Producer Ted Templeman said this song was inspired by the pace at which the band were recording albums

Eddie sporting the mini-guitar he bought from David Petschulat, used on the appropriately named *Little Guitars* from *Diver Down*

14 LITTLE GUITARS

This straightforward AOR rocker from *Diver Down* is notable chiefly for its amazing flamenco-flavoured classical-guitar intro, which consists of a flurried combination of blurry right-hand picking on the open E, B and D strings, and left-hand slurs on the low E. "Everyone thinks I overdubbed on that," EVH told *Musician*. "Then I show them how I did it. Classical guitarists can do that but they finger-pick. I can't finger-pick. No, I definitely cheated. I'm good at that. If there's a sound in my head and I want it, I'll find a way to do it. I bought a couple Montoya records. I actually tried to finger-pick and I'm going, 'Screw this, it's too hard.'" We still don't believe him.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

The song's main riff was played on a miniature Les Paul-style guitar created especially for Eddie by Nashville luthier David Petschulat

13 TOP JIMMY

This track stands as a sensational example of how EVH could fry tiny minds even when he wasn't tearing out mighty solos. For *Top Jimmy*, he used a custom Ripley Stereo Guitar, a newly created true-stereo instrument with a Bartolini humbucker that sent a signal from each of its polepieces, with the output of each controlled by six knobs on the guitar's lower bout. That's how Van Halen created the alternating panning effect for the shimmering harmonics on the song's intro and the part that follows. The song is also a prime instance of Eddie's masterful ability to combine chicken-pickin', flash-chord inversions and more into his often overlooked rhythm playing.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

The tune began life as an instrumental entitled *Ripley* before David Lee Roth added a lyric about his Hollywood cohort James Koneck

12 GIRL GONE BAD

In ways a companion piece to *Top Jimmy*, this relatively under-celebrated tune from *1984* brings together the multifaceted disciplines of Eddie's playing into one magically fluid prog-pop-rock opus. Cycling restlessly through sophisticated harmonic melodies and into strident ascending chord progressions, washes of arpeggio picking, chunky doublestop rhythms, brief tapping interludes and all manner of sound effects, its solo is a jaw-dropper. Alternating between blazingly fast legato runs, pedal-note ascents, outrageous bends, unexplored scalar territory and more besides, it's as creatively off the wall as anything EVH ever played. It's also an amazing demonstration of how telepathic a unit Van Halen had become as a band.

SWEET DREAMS

Eddie had the idea for this track late at night but, not wanting to wake his wife, he wrote it by humming into a cassette recorder in the hotel-room closet

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11 CATHEDRAL

Van Halen followed the brooding *Fair Warning* with 1982's *Diver Down*, a hastily concocted 30-minute collection with as many covers as originals and a couple of brief instrumental interludes for good measure. *Cathedral* is one of the latter, a haunting oddity that begins with soothing chord swells before breaking into a divine delayed arpeggio soundscape that's as far from the band's pool-party roots as it gets. EVH created the sound with a 1961 Fender Stratocaster going into an Echoplex tape delay unit.

HOT AND COLD

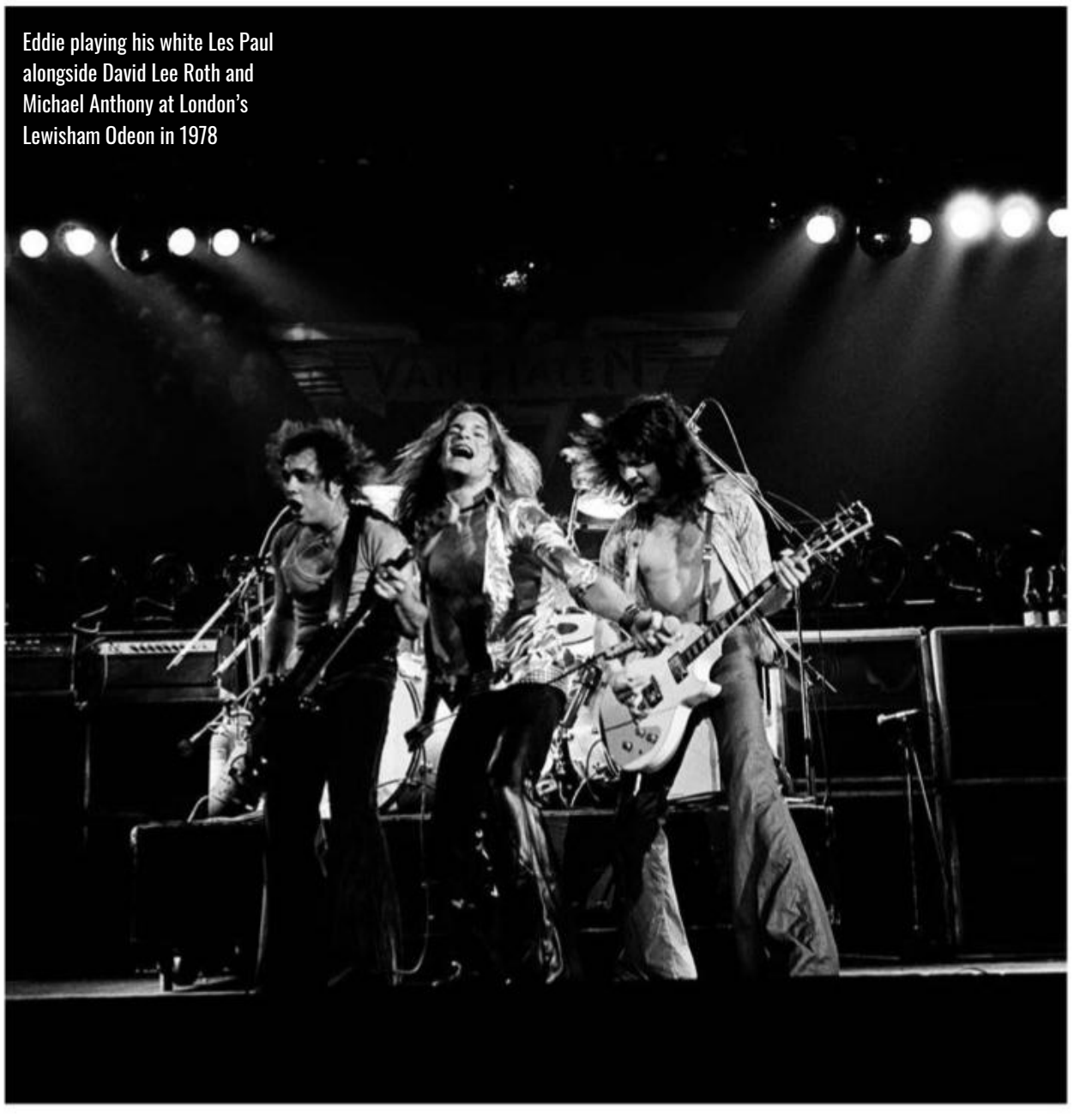
EVH broke the volume control of his Strat during the two-take recording of this track. "If you turn it up and down too fast, it heats up and freezes," he said. "I did two takes of that song and, right at the end of the second take, the volume knob just froze. It stopped"

10 MEAN STREET

On fourth album *Fair Warning*, Van Halen turned away from the good-time party music of their previous records and the playboy antics personified by frontman David Lee Roth in favour of a grittier and more aggressive approach. *Mean Street* provides one of the record's highlights, on account of its muscular main riff and, before that, an astonishing rhythmic intro in which Eddie elicits harmonics with a slap-bass-style right-hand tapping technique that incorporates his thumb, while simultaneously using his left hand to dampen the strings in between hammer-ons, pull-offs and doublestops. The result is a unique rhythmic figure that's virtually inimitable, though many have tried.

EVERYTHING I DO, I DO IT FOR YOU

Eddie once taught Bryan Adams how to perform the right-hand part of the song's intro while backstage at a show



Eddie playing his white Les Paul alongside David Lee Roth and Michael Anthony at London's Lewisham Odeon in 1978

9 RUNNIN' WITH THE DEVIL

This song's throbbing bassline proved the perfect backdrop for Eddie's dynamic guitar. It begins with a rake of the strings between the bridge and the stop tailpiece of Eddie's Ibanez Destroyer, steals the spotlight with ringing chords soaked in reverb from one of Sound Studio's EMT plate reverb units, then simmers down behind the verses into a southern-rock chord workout with hard-rock squalls of lead and rapidly picked harmonics.

DEVIL HORNS

The sound at the start of the song comes from the band's car horns, rigged to two car batteries, with a footswitch to control them

8 UNCHAINED

Few EVH riffs come close to the monster that is *Unchained*, its dashes of slow-cycling flanger selling a boatload of MXR M-117 pedals in its wake. There's further creativity beyond the main riff, especially in the solo section, with its stuttering time signature and staccato lead lines.

UNCHAINED MELODIES

Tensions between EVH and Ted Templeman ran high during the making of *Fair Warning*. "I ended up doing 90 per cent of the guitar tracking at four o'clock in the morning with our engineer Donn Landee," said Eddie

7 I'M THE ONE

All the more astonishing for the fact that it was recorded without overdubs, *I'm The One* features a melting pot of Eddie's chugging rhythms, whammy-bar effects, lightspeed tremolo picking, octave licks, feedback squalls and more. Not OTT enough? Try adding a barbershop-quartet interlude.

ONE AND ONLY

Debut LP *Van Halen* was recorded straight to tape in Studio One of Sunset Sound Recorders in Hollywood, with minimal overdubs to preserve the band's live feel

© Fin Costello / Redferns / Getty Images

Eddie with his Ibanez Destroyer at London's Rainbow Theatre in 1978

6 AIN'T TALKIN' 'BOUT LOVE

This largely two-chord wonder, with its outro screams of "Hey! Hey! Hey!", was originally intended as a punk parody. Eddie felt it was trivial and didn't even show it to his bandmates until a year after he'd written it, and it was among the final songs recorded for their debut. But thanks to the band's musicality, the track perfectly treads the fine line between rawness and sophistication. Consider the rapid picking of its cycling opening riff, which sounds finger-twistingly complex until you realise it's just spelling out three cowboy chords: Am to F to G. The song's middle section too proves that Van Halen could throw light and shade among the hard-rock fireworks.

LOVE STRUCK

Eddie doubled the melodic MXR Phase-90-coated solo section with a buzzy-fretted Coral electric sitar from LA's Studio Instrument Rentals

5 HOT FOR TEACHER

Van Halen's propulsive rhythm section arguably reached its apex with this high-octane blues shuffle from mega-hit album *1984*. It begins with an impossible-sounding double-double-bass drum intro that bears a passing resemblance to Billy Cobham's equally nuts *Quadrant 4* from 1973 but becomes even more unhinged across the four minutes that follow, as the gang engages in one of their most beloved and playful tunes. When it comes, the solo break hits like a runaway train. It features a series of head-scrambling licks that once again broke new lead-guitar ground with their splicing of turbocharged rock 'n' roll and blues vocabulary with Eddie's own unique brand of intense sci-fi sonics. The track was a live staple for many years.

SCHOOL'S IN SESSION

Eddie used a 1958 Gibson Flying V for *Hot For Teacher*, as well as for *Girl Gone Bad*, taken from the same album. The guitar came from vintage collector Dan Martin

4 PANAMA

Featuring one of the most quintessentially 1980s uses of pinched harmonics outside of a ZZ Top record, *Panama*'s irresistible main riff reminded MTV audiences that had been weaned on *1984*'s previous singles *Jump* and *I'll Wait* – both comparatively heavy on synth – that Van Halen were most first and foremost a guitar band. For the song's tremendous rhythm part, Eddie pulled out all the stops and showed that even palm-muted picked chords were part of his repertoire. It deserved a solo to match – and the guitarist didn't disappoint, with EVH using a Chuck riff as a launchpad for some bending-and-tapping horseplay, before his sinuous repeated melodies in the Free-like middle section built the intensity to a perfect crescendo.

POWER STEERING

Listen out for EVH's car. "They thought we were nuts to pull up my Lamborghini to the studio and mic it," he told *Guitar World*. "I revved the engine to 80,000rpm"

Eddie and the second incarnation of his Frankenstrat guitar, in the midst of his trademark jump

3 JUMP

Upon its release in 1983, *Jump* was a real outlier in Van Halen's discography. Rather than Eddie's Frankenstrat guitar through a Marshall stack, the track opens with an Oberheim synth. The keyboard line was written around the turn of the decade but was initially rejected by the band. Resurrected and married to a David Lee Roth lyric, the song was recorded in the space of a night and over the following day at EVH's home studio, 5150. It became the band's most famous song and their only US No.1.

Thankfully for us six-stringers, Eddie included a flawless guitar solo composition within a composition that, like the next track, was technically precise in its execution but human in its timing and physicality (though, like the next track, it too was comped together from at least two takes).

JUMPING TRACKS

Jump's outro riff was so good that it was recycled for the intro to the song *Top Of The World* from Van Halen's 1991 album *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*

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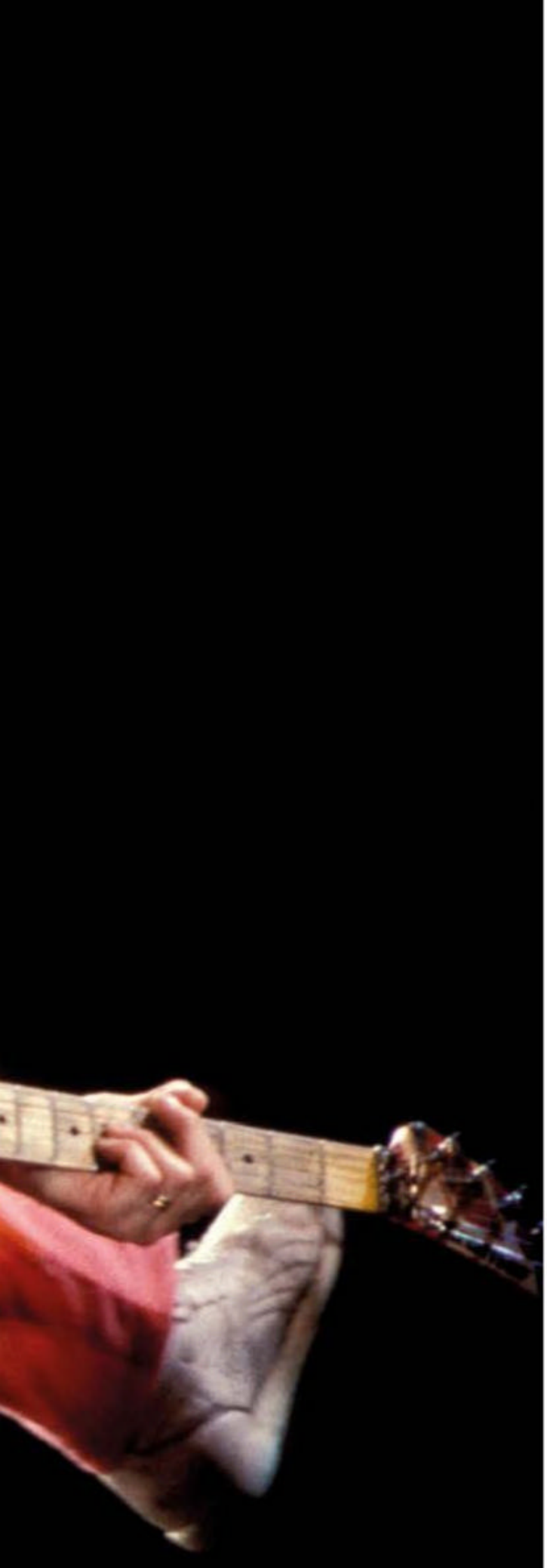

Eddie on stage with Randy and Michael during The Jacksons' Victory Tour in 1984

BEAT IT

After he'd had the audacity to rearrange the future King of Pop's *Beat It* to better suit his sensibilities (he wasn't getting a fee or credit for it, after all), Eddie casually embarked on 20 minutes of studio work that was later distilled into a solo that lasted a mere 20 seconds. But what a 20 seconds it was. Eddie's howling tornado of two-handed tapping, whammy-swept harmonics, tremolo picking, outlandish bends and sound effects played its part in making *Thriller* the best-selling album of all time, and has been imprinted across the fingertips of both hands of generations of rock-loving guitarists ever since.

BEATEN TO IT

After its release, EVH heard *Beat It* in a record store and someone in front of him said, "Listen to this guy trying to sound like Eddie Van Halen". The guitarist tapped him on the shoulder and said, "That *is* me!"

Eddie hitting the high notes at the Lewisham Odeon in 1978

1

ERUPTION

EVH's calling card – the 103 seconds of molten guitar lava we all know and love – only made it onto the band's debut album because producer Ted Templeman happened to walk by when the guitarist was practising his solo spot for an upcoming gig and suggested that they put it on tape. Eddie obliged, recording two or three takes and keeping the one that "seemed to flow".

These days, we're so familiar with its once-spectacular twists and turns that it's easy to be blasé about the impact that *Eruption* had on the guitar-playing world. But it really did send a generation of players scurrying off to their garages, bedrooms and practice rooms to plug in, stare at their guitar necks in disbelief and try to make sense of what the hell they'd just heard.

Though many of these shellshocked players didn't think about it at the time, the track's innovative tone was almost as important as its playing. *Eruption* was played on Eddie's Frankenstrat, tuned down a half-step, through his MXR Phase 90, with an Echoplex and a Univox EC-80 echo unit (housed in an old WWII bomb casing), into his 1968 Marshall 1959 Super Lead. It was truly a unique rig.

Eruption announced that EVH was frighteningly accomplished. He was a complete player in terms of tone, technique and showmanship. He had it all. But in truth, he didn't stand still. His style developed in major ways over the years that followed. Most notably, he developed his combination of harmonics and tapping (the so-called 'false' or 'artificial' harmonics technique) and took that innovation further than anyone before him.

Understandably, even 43 years on from when it was recorded, for many, *Eruption* still represents the pinnacle of electric-guitar playing. Listening to it again with fresh ears, it's hard to argue.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

EVH was critical of the recording. "Whenever I hear it, I always think, 'Man, I could have played that better'," he told *Guitar World* in 1996, making generations of struggling-to-keep-up players feel even worse about their own abilities

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ENTRY
Road Studios
THE Guitar INTERVIEW

FOALS

WORDS HUW BAINES
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Since bursting on to the scene in 2017 IDLES have become the standard bearers for a new kind of rock 'n' roll masculinity. Now as they unleash third album *Ultra Mono* on the world, we caught up with guitarists Mark Bowen and Lee Kiernan to find out how on earth we got here…

Mark Bowen and Lee Kiernan are trying to describe the sort of sounds that tear through the new Idles record. "KRRRING! KRRRONG! KRRRONK!" they shout, gesticulating widly over Zoom. They could've saved themselves the effort: the new Idles album sounds like the sky falling.

Ultra Mono is the band's third outing, and follows the Mercury-nominated *Joy As An Act of Resistance*, an album that broke the quintet into the mainstream spotlight and almost broke its members in two, both physically and mentally. Idles are a touring band. They exist in order to share a dialogue with the people on the other side of the barrier and, in supporting *Joy*, they played about 400 shows in just a few years.

Onto their shoulders the band hefted the record's mix of grief and anger – vocalist Joe Talbot sang of the death of his daughter Agatha and railed against toxic masculinity and the rise of right-wing populism – and set off for rooms that grew in size as the miles disappeared beneath the wheels of their bus.
At different times, it all became too much.

"Even now I'm still having issues with my mental health because I didn't stand up to what my problems were when we were finishing touring *Joy*," Kiernan says. "I just thought, 'I'm tired, that's all it is'. But it wasn't. I was depressed. I have two prolapsed discs. I was in pain every day. Gigging with that ate away at me. We took three months off post-*Joy*, which I thought was going to give me the rest I needed. But it didn't."

Bowen hit the wall in Paris, four months into touring. "I wasn't functioning as a human being," he says. "The majority of *Ultra Mono* comes from Joe and myself, who had already been on the journey that Lee went on at the end of touring. The album is describing that process and what comes out the other end: I love this, I have to be confident in myself, I am me, I am playing to my strengths, I'm part of this."

BRUTAL FIGHT

Idles formed in Bristol in 2009, navigating a few years as a so-so indie concern before bursting into life with their *Meat* EP in 2015 and their 2017 debut LP *Brutalism*. In an ordinary world, the band would have already racked up 100 or more gigs this year.

18+

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Stop, look and listen to Idles. Guitarists Mark Bowen and Lee Kiernan pose by the road outside Abbey Road Studios

Instead, with COVID-19 wiping their calendars clean, the lads recently suited up for livestream sets captured at Abbey Road (outside which our socially distanced photo shoot takes place). Fun, right? "It was the hardest thing I think we've ever done as a band," says Bowen. "I can't explain how psychologically difficult that was."

Idles – completed by the murderous rhythm section of bassist Adam Devonshire and drummer Jon Beavis – function because of muscle memory honed on the road and the energy generated by their audiences. They would have neither at Abbey Road. Their first rehearsal was only a few weeks before the cameras were due to roll.

"I think we had two or three with the full band, playing stuff that we hadn't played live before," says Bowen. "If you think of some songs from *Brutalism*, we've been playing them for maybe about six years. I've never had to think about what my fingers do when I play *Mother*. It's all feel."

For Kiernan, the hill was steeper still. "I was late to the band because I live in Hamburg," he says. "When I got back for the first time, it was just me, Jon and Dev. They started *Mother* and I played every note wrong. I just stood there looking at my guitar."

BITING BACK

The band's battles with self-belief might have cast a long shadow but the songs on *Ultra Mono* bit back at every turn. For Idles, the record is about accepting who you are, that you are enough and that you can thrive on your own terms. It's that and letting people know what they think in the most straightforward manner possible. To that end, Idles are a spectacularly divisive band, a lot of which has to do with Talbot's bare-knuckle sloganeering and posi-polemics.

Bowen recently began using this custom Electrical Guitar Company guitar, which sports a Travis Bean-style aluminium neck and lucite Ampeg Dan Armstrong-vibed body

To detractors, Talbot is didactic, even hypocritical and virtue-signalling. To the band's fans – which include a 30,000 strong Facebook community called the AF Gang – he's a lightning rod. His words on *Ultra Mono* veer from empathetic calls for unity to primary school rhymes and straight-ahead fury.

"Some people misunderstand our songs," says Bowen. "It could come across that we're telling them, 'We've got everything sorted'. But we need these mantras for our own self-confidence. Joe, especially. He sings 'love yourself' because he struggles to love himself. The themes on this album are very personal to Joe because he's holding a mirror up to himself and going, 'Fuck, this is me'. So often, when Joe is singing, he's sharing something that we've all shared. That's why people like our band. They go, 'I've been in that position'."

On *Grounds*, Talbot underlines that sentiment with force. "Do you hear that thunder? That's the sound of strength in numbers," he drawls. His voice is enmeshed by squalling, heavily manipulated guitars alongside the crushing weight of Beavis's snare. The challenge for the band is to match Talbot's duck-and-weave bark with something that delivers the same sort of rabble-rousing bluster. "The creative process starts with a title, almost as a manifesto," says Bowen.

"SOME PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND OUR SONGS. IT COULD COME ACROSS THAT WE'RE TELLING THEM, 'WE'VE GOT EVERYTHING SORTED'. BUT WE NEED THESE MANTRAS FOR OUR OWN SELF-CONFIDENCE"

"We'll talk about what *Ultra Mono* means lyrically, as well as what it means sonically."

Ultra Mono is an album of extremes from top to bottom. It was largely written in two weeks and recorded in two more at La Frette studios, near Paris, with returning producers Nick Launay and Adam Greenspan. Talbot's words were often conjured on the spot. The LP's guests range from the Bad Seeds' Warren Ellis and Savages' Jehnny Beth to the Jesus Lizard's David Yow and jazz-lite pianist Jamie Cullum. After all that, it took four months to mix, as Idles sought to deliver the handbrake turns they had hard-coded into the songs.

"We wanted it to be of the moment," says Bowen. "It was so important to get the drum sound exactly as it should be, then to get the guitars to work with the drums, or separately, so that it could be as powerful or as loud an album as possible. There was a lot of Lee and I making decisions about where we stood in the frequency bandwidth. A lot of the time, me and Dev form this one instrument and Lee's this spike, the top end. It was all about keeping things simple and being mindful of what everyone else is doing so you're part of this one whole thing."

PERFECT BALANCE

Bowen and Kiernan have found the ideal foil in one another, coming from disparate musical beginnings to achieve aggro equilibrium in their playing. When one vacates a space, the other dives in. "I've got photos of me playing a toy guitar at age two," says Bowen, noting influences from Kurt Cobain and Jack White to Duane Denison and Dick Dale. "My dad played and my uncle was in a band. I loved how beautiful they were, and that they had a purpose. My daughter is one year old, she'll pull the strings and it adds energy to a room instantly."

Kiernan's route was more circuitous. "When I was younger, I loved Motown and classical music," he says. "Then I got into drugs and slammed it really hard. I thought, 'You know what, I'll join the Marines'. I got knocked down medically with a broken wrist, a broken toe, a kidney infection. On the way home, I was on the phone to my mate and he was like, 'Why don't you play bass in my band?'"

Kiernan's Shell Pink Fender Player Series Baja Telecaster has many, many tour-related battle scars

"I HAVE A PLAYER SERIES TELE WITH A BARE KNUCKLE PICKUP, THEN MY PINK BAJA TELE. BOTH OF THEM ARE BEAT-UP. THEY'VE BEEN TOURED HEAVILY. SO MUCH SO THAT I HAD TO TUNE IT EVERY SINGLE TIME I STOPPED PLAYING"

Kiernan started playing bass at the age of 16. "I hated it," he says. "I was like, 'I'm going to play guitar.' I started playing Blink-182 covers. I was obsessed with the 1980s so I learnt anything by Brian May. Then the drugs came back. I stopped playing for six years and became a chronic alcoholic and drug addict. I got sober and joined this band. Here I am now. It doesn't really make any sense."

The guitars on *Ultra Mono* are a genuine team sport. Bowen and Kiernan hold fire when needed before flooding the EQ spectrum, hoovering up every inch of room. Key to their success is the understanding that noise is an element of their approach that requires the same care and attention as each riff and melody. As *Grounds* powers to its conclusion, there is a palpable feeling that Idles are trying to physically overwhelm the listener.

"One of the big points with belief in yourself is to understand where your strengths lie," says Bowen. "One of Lee's greatest strengths is making those harsh sounds that go with the snares, those really caustic jabs. The strength that I was playing to was this big, rung-out bassy-sounding feedback, like on the end of *Grounds*. It's about rhythm too."

Kiernan takes the baton. "On the second part of the verse, Bowen's playing between the stabs," he says. "It creates that flow, it makes you want to move to it. On *Reigns*, playing along with Dev, he's adding rhythm and drive and motion to the song." He pauses. "Isn't this nice? We're telling each other what we're good at."

The flip side is the time the pair spent trying to ensure that their guitars sounded nothing like guitars at all. *Ultra Mono* is the closest they feel they've come to successfully incorporating their hip-hop influences, with producer Kenny Beats, fresh from mixtapes with Rico Nasty and 03 Greedo, chiming in, and Kanye West's *Yeezus* exerting a profound hold over the shrieking metallic nature of the album's palette.

"I think *Grounds* is actually a hip-hop song," says Bowen. "In trying to become our influences, we pushed our guitar playing to its natural conclusion. The intro to that song doesn't sound like a guitar. It sounds like a synth. If you listen to Lee's guitar on *Danke*, it sounds like someone smashing bits of metal. I almost exclusively listen to electronic music with bizarre found sounds and horrible noises. It looms large in my thought process."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Reflecting the nature of *Ultra Mono* as a maximalist record that almost always views the loudest and most confrontational option as the best way to go, Idles' gear ranged from the bare essentials to tools designed for noisy excess. Guitar-wise, Bowen welcomed an Electrical Guitar Company custom on board for the first time, seeing it as a conduit to achieve his vision.

"I didn't have that guitar when I was writing but I had it in mind," he says. "It's able to make these Steve Albini-type harsh sounds but, on the other side, my favourite band, Sunn O))), use them to make that heavy BRRRM sound. Those are the two sounds I make on this album, so that was pivotal. I also used one of the new Player Series Stratocasters.

"I use Creamery pickups on all my Fenders. Jaime [Campbell] has this ice pick, this really trebly one called the Red '79. The poles of the magnet are particularly strong around the D and G strings, which works with the music we play. I used that on the more traditional garage-rock sounding ones. It has this rough-and-ready late 1970s post-punk sound."

"ISN'T THIS NICE? WE'RE TELLING EACH OTHER WHAT WE'RE GOOD AT"

This had a knock-on effect: Kiernan turned to Creamery too, using the Manchester brand's Dark Line pickup when he borrowed Bowen's Mustang for *Model Village*. Otherwise, he stuck to his road warrior Telecasters. "I didn't rock the boat," he says. "I have a Player Series Tele with a Bare Knuckle pickup, then my pink Baja Tele. Both of them are beat-up. They've been toured heavily. So much so that I had to tune it every single time I stopped playing. There's also my Esquire, which is a Partscaster with Mojo Broadcaster bridge pickup. Apart from his EGC, Bowen and I only have bridge pickups straight to volume, no tone."

Then there are the wildcards: a '71 Musicmaster and a Bajo Sexto baritone Telecaster that walked into Bowen's life at exactly the right time. "I used the Musicmaster on the intro to *A Hymn*," he says. "I'd set up the pickups in series and had them with just the volume control. Basically, I turned them down until they were extremely quiet and then had my pedals really loud. It made this John Carpenter-style synth sound when I played it with my fingers.

"On every single song, I play a baritone part to either bolster the bass or my guitar. Olivier [Bloch Lainé], who owns La Frette studios, was a composer and was in pop bands in the 1960s. One of the rooms above the studios where people stay features walls and walls of his guitars. He was very convivial and good to chat to at dinner. He walked down with the baritone guitar and was like, 'I've been listening to you and I don't know why but I feel like this is going to help you'. It felt amazing to play and sounded incredible. It has a real vibe."

A lot of the guitars on *Ultra Mono* ended up going straight to desk but that didn't stop Bowen and Kiernan assembling massive amp rigs in order to achieve even the slightest competitive advantage.

"IT WAS MORE IS MORE IS MORE IS MORE. WE HAD MORE THAN 10 AMPS EACH BUT, WHERE NECESSARY, THERE ARE NO EFFECTS"

The pair are also pedal fiends, and they demanded everything that each bit of kit could give, with Bowen calling on a Red Panda Ratster for the opening skronk of *Grounds*, and Kiernan hammering an Interstellar Overdriver by Death By Audio for fuzz at every turn.

"It was more is more is more is more," says Bowen, with a laugh. "We had more than 10 amps each but, where necessary, there are no effects. It's just guitar meets mixing desk. In a way, that's simplifying things and making things more present but, in order to make these simple parts sound incredible, you have to make it sound exactly as it does in your head. We had to use our pedalboards to their full potential."

Kiernan describes the lengths that Idles went to in order to secure the right elements with one anecdote about a feedback section to accent *Reigns*' relentless post-punk yowl. "It's situational," he says. "With the amount of amps we had in the room, we had to turn them all to the wall so we weren't bleeding into every microphone. I was doing my take in a one-foot space between the wall and the amp – when the guitar was there, it went ballistic. If we didn't set up like that, we wouldn't have got that sound."

Ultra Mono is a mass of contradictions. It is spontaneous. It is meticulously crafted. It is ambitious and florid. It is a blunt instrument. People will love it. People will hate it. It's Idles in miniature. "The thing about this band is that we're open," says Kiernan. "We talk about our problems. We engage with these feelings and help each other through moments of despair. That, for me, is what this album means."

***Ultra Mono* is out now on Partisan Records**

ABOVE Idles putting the crowd of 2018's Leeds Festival in a headlock

FACING PAGE Shortly before our shoot, Idles played the first of three livestreamed sets at Abbey Road. It would be the final performance of Bowen's trusty Stratocaster, which he smashed to bits on the studio floor during closing song *Rottweiler*

© Visionhaus / Corbis via Getty Images

JOEY B.

London Calling

WORDS JOSH GARDNER
PORTRAITS JIM HERRINGTON
LIVE KIT WOOD

When Joe Bonamassa decided he wanted to make an album that wasn't just inspired by his love of British blues-rock but felt authentically *like* a British record, there was only one thing to do. He holed up in Abbey Road Studios with Bernie Marsden and an all-star band, picked up a load of vintage British gear and emerged five weeks later with *Royal Tea*. We take a sip and sit down with the 43-year-old to discuss Bursts, playing under pressure, cheese toasties and the 20th anniversary of his solo recording career

When you're two decades and 40-odd albums into your solo career, you could be forgiven for running low on inspiration or fresh ideas for how to get the creative juices flowing. But Joe Bonamassa had no such issues – he was going to London to make a record, testing his hypothesis that an album's sound is as much about *where* it's written as it's about what's going on in your head at the time.

And that's exactly what he did earlier this year. Teaming up with Whitesnake legend Bernie Marsden, Cream lyricist Pete Brown, Dave Stewart, Jools Holland and an all-star cast of collaborators at the legendary Abbey Road Studios, Bonamassa settled in to write and record the album that would become *Royal Tea*.

"I'm happy with the way it came out. Travelling to London, writing the record with Bernie and Pete and Jools and Dave, it did what it was supposed to do," says Joe, reflecting on the record from the other end of a Zoom call. "I hear the British influence just because I was in Britannia. I knew I wanted to do a record in London, and I always wanted to see if my theory played out, that if I immersed myself in British culture, it would make the music sound British. So I didn't come in there with the idea of making a record that was a tribute to Eric Clapton or Peter Green or whoever. I wanted to make songs that sounded inherently like British blues-rock, y'know? I think we accomplished that."

How he ended up with this interesting cast of legends from various genres and backgrounds was a matter of serendipity as much as anything else. But it all began with Bernie.

"We've always threatened to write together," says Joe of his friend of more than a decade and the owner of one of Joe's favourite '59s (see p58). "I've always had the utmost respect for him as a musician. I would say underestimate Bernie Marsden at your peril, because as a singer he'll kick your ass, as a player he'll kick your ass and as a songwriter he'll definitely kick your ass!"

It was Bernie who got Joe involved with 2018's Cream Acoustic project, which paired the late Ginger Baker with a variety of musicians to record unplugged takes on Cream classics. And it was this that ultimately set the wheels in motion for *Royal Tea*.

© Christie Goodwin

OPPOSITE Joe with 'Lazarus' – the 1959 Les Paul he recently had restored to its original glory – performing a live streaming concert from Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in September 2020

ABOVE Joe and the band tracking *Royal Tea* at London's iconic Abbey Road Studios back in January

"We were in Abbey Road Studio 2. It was me, Bernie and Pete Brown," says Joe. "We've all known each other for years. So I'm looking around and I thought, 'Y'know what? This wouldn't be the worst idea I've ever had'. So I said the words out loud, 'All three of us should make my next record in London'. They were like, 'Yeah! That'd be great!'" A year or so later, the three were back in Abbey Road doing it.

ROAD TO SOMEWHERE

Holing up in the world's most famous recording studio for more than a month is certainly a fine way to mark 20 years since the release of his debut solo LP *A New Day Yesterday* – an album that was recorded in far less iconic surroundings, something that's clearly not lost on Joe.

"I never imagined I could do something like this 20 years ago," he says. "That first record was recorded in Ithaca in New York, which is not a bad place. But if you'd said to me 20 years ago that I'd be taking an Addison Lee to Abbey Road Studios and that'd be my office for five weeks, I'd be like, 'You're out of your mind!'"

Given that it's Abbey bloody Road Studios, you'd expect that recording in the hallowed halls that birthed everything from *Apache* to *Revolver* to *The Dark Side Of The Moon* would lend its own kind of pressure to the sessions. But for Joe that didn't even come into the equation.

"Not to sound flippant but no," he says. "I'll tell you why. I've played Peter Green's Les Paul on stage at the Albert Hall. I've played Alvin Lee's guitar. I've played Rory Gallagher's guitar. I've played Clapton's Blackie and the Hare Krishna 335 – and what I've learnt from playing these legendary guitars is that there's one of two things that can happen: you can play the guitar how you want to play, or you can let the moment play you!

"UNDERESTIMATE BERNIE MARSDEN AT YOUR PERIL, BECAUSE AS A SINGER HE'LL KICK YOUR ASS, AS A PLAYER HE'LL KICK YOUR ASS AND AS A SONGWRITER HE'LL DEFINITELY KICK YOUR ASS!"

"It's the same thing with a venue. You can play the Albert Hall but do you want the Albert Hall to play you? That's exactly how it was with Abbey Road. You walk in and, yeah, you recognise Studio 2. You recognise that staircase. You know exactly what's gone down there. That's the *Hey Jude* piano. There's the EMI console that did *Dark Side Of The Moon*. I ran into my friend Nick Mason who gave me a tour of Studio 3, where they made that album, and I was like, 'This is fantastic! Let me see the John Lennon *Revolver* mic again!'

"But guess what all of that will not do for you? Write the fucking songs. Abbey Road didn't write the songs for The Beatles. The Beatles wrote the songs. They just happened to be at Abbey Road. Once you disconnect from that, you just go, 'Oh okay, we're here to make a record'. And that's pretty much how I looked at it.

"Yes, it was a great honour. We had a little office there where Bernie and I would write, and we were camped there for weeks before we made the record. Is it really cool to be like, 'I'm going to work today' and walk through those doors and see the lovely lady who makes the best tomato and cheese toastie you'll ever have, who's been working there since The Beatles recorded there? Yeah, it's fantastic. All of it is *great*. But that doesn't take away from the fact that you're there to work."

LAZARUS ARISEN

When it came to tracking *Royal Tea* at Abbey Road, Bonamassa had a typically enviable arsenal of guitars ready to roll, including the modded 1952 Telecaster that used to belong to British singer Terry Reid. But to really capture that ineffable British vibe that the album was crying out for, Joe had to leave the comfort of the studio and head out on one of his famous guitar safaris.

OPPOSITE More live action for Lazarus. Before he had it restored, the '59 Les Paul was in pieces and had been sprayed red everywhere except the headstock veneer and body cavities

ABOVE Joe and Whitesnake legend Bernie Marsden, with whom he co-wrote the album and has built a great friendship

"Y'know, I've never been a Brit amp guy. Marshalls excluded, of course," says Joe. "I don't have an Orange. Don't have a Hiwatt. I did have a Selmer Zodiac 30 once but it always broke and was a pain in the ass – and expensive.

"So I took my friend Joanne Shaw Taylor and her dad on a guitar crawl when I was in London. We went down Denmark Street and there was a shop there that sold mostly new guitars but they had this Selmer Truvoice that I plugged in and it was just really rich and chewy, and it distorted well. It just sounded good. It was relatively cheap too – it was like, £700 or £800."

With the Selmer, plus a Watkins Dominator and a Zemaitis purchased from New Kings Road Vintage Guitars on the way home, Joe was ready to bring the British tone to *Royal Tea*.

"They were incredibly useful in the studio," he says. "I was really thrilled with how useful they were, especially the Truvoice. That thing just kicked ass. It's in my living room right now."

One other new addition to the sessions was a special guitar that Joe had never even played before. Followers of Joe's Instagram might remember seeing him post some pictures of a Les Paul-shaped object that had clearly seen better days back at the start of the year. Clumsily sprayed in a dark flat red, this guitar didn't look like much. But underneath was lurking a bona fide 1959, which Joe had brought back to its former glory and nicknamed Lazarus.

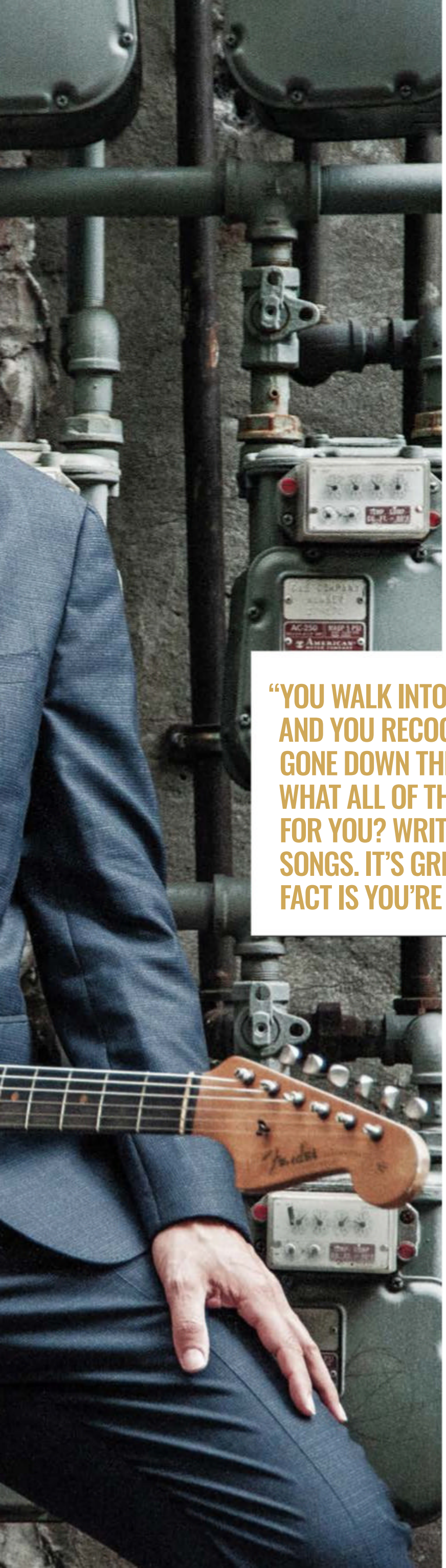
"I hadn't seen it done before I left for Abbey Road. My guy Rick Gould was coming over. I'm not really a registered museum but I feel like it sometimes, and he's the curator of my museum and everything else. So he was coming over to London and I was like, 'Dude, bring the guitar, I really want to see it'. I must have paid for somebody's parking inadvertently or something, because I was so lucky to stumble on to that thing."

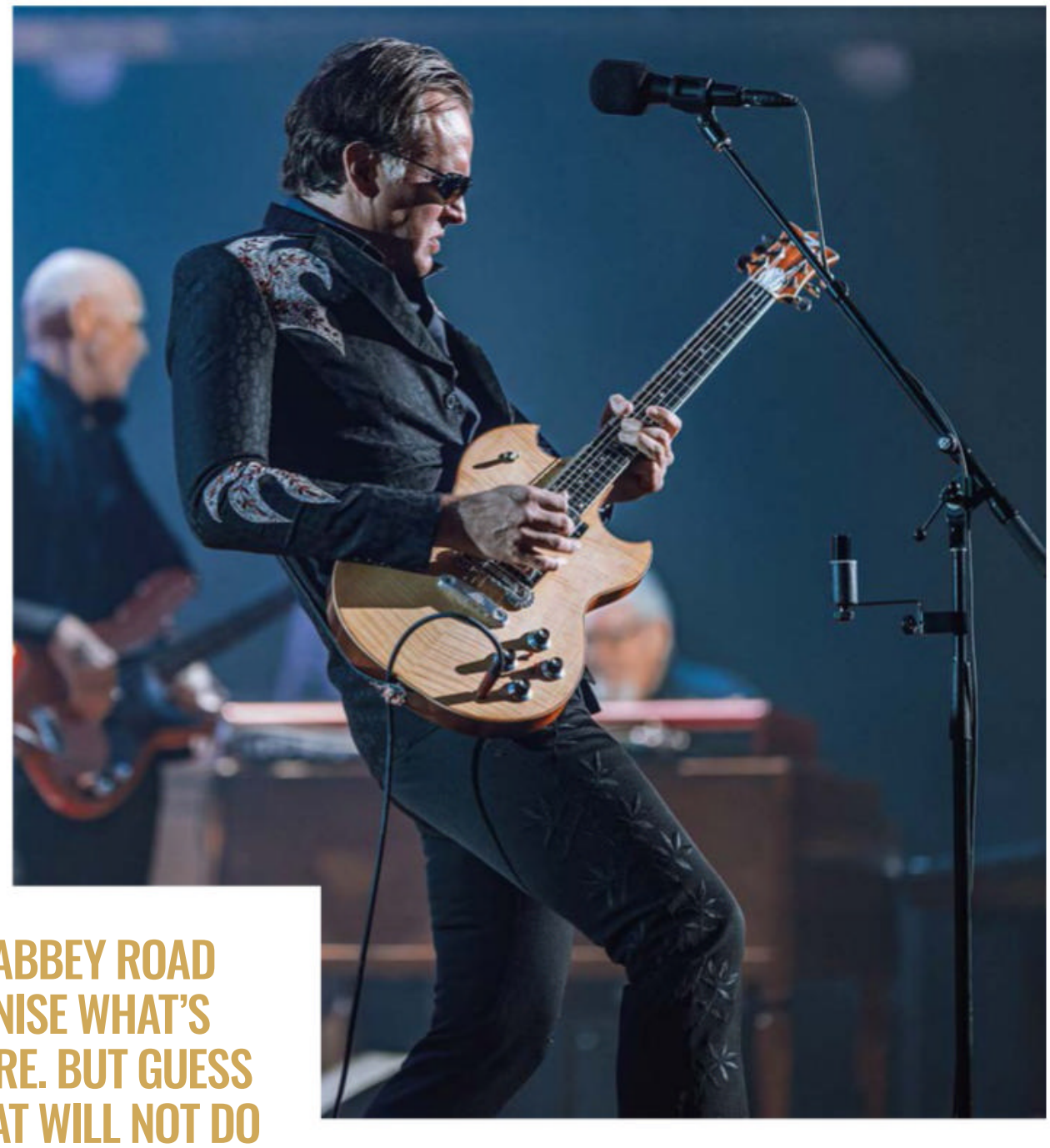
There's a fair bit of serendipity about how Joe and the guitar came together. Joe first spotted the instrument on the Instagram of his friend, LA luthier David Neely. It was sprayed and in pieces, the caption claiming it was an "alleged '59".

"I texted him, 'What the hell is that?!' but he never got back to me," says Joe. "Then, in December, we had this little guitar get-together in North Hollywood and I ran into him and said, 'David, good to see you, man. Did you bring the red thing?', because people often bring stuff for show-and-tell at these events. He said, 'I was hoping you'd be here. I brought it for you to take a look at, daddio!'

"By that point, David had stripped all the parts off and put it in a box. He said, 'The guy wants it restored but he only wants to give me like a thousand dollars for it'. So I took a look at this guitar and, at this point, the thing was still red – and when I say they'd painted it red, I mean they had painted it *red*. They had even painted over the binding.

Joe's pre-CBS 'Joey B' Jazzmaster – it's easy to see why he felt he had to buy it when his friend Joe Menza from Best Guitars showed it to him back in 2017





“YOU WALK INTO ABBEY ROAD AND YOU RECOGNISE WHAT’S GONE DOWN THERE. BUT GUESS WHAT ALL OF THAT WILL NOT DO FOR YOU? WRITE THE FUCKING SONGS. IT’S GREAT, BUT THE FACT IS YOU’RE THERE TO WORK”

ABOVE A Zemaitis bought by Joe for the recording of *Royal Tea*, featuring a built-in boost circuit

THIS IMAGE Joe with a ’63 Strat on stage in Nashville

Everything was red except the holly veneer on the headstock, in the cavities and in the back cavity – and thank goodness, because I looked at the neck tenon and thought, 'Well, I like that'. Then I looked at the holly veneer and the logo placement, and I looked at the factory-large frets and thought, 'I like that'. And then I spun it around and looked inside the cavity and looked at the tube and where the ground wire was coming out and I liked it all!

"So I was staring at the top trying to see if it's got any kind of curl, trying to see a seam, and all these people who are all guitar experts were chiming in: 'No, that's a converted Goldtop' and 'Oh, it's a '68', and I was thinking, 'Yeah, you guys keep talking, I'm going to keep looking'. I decided I needed to take a look at the parts to be sure.

"So I headed down to David's shop on Sunset Boulevard and he pulled the box of parts, and it was two PAFs, two real M69s [pickup rings], all the tuners, the truss-rod cover, the nickel hardware, the knobs, and I liked it all. Then I took a look at the pots, and it was the original harness, dated to the seventh week of 1959. So I was like, 'Well, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, guess what it is?!'

"IF YOU'RE BUYING A JOE BONAMASSA RECORD NOW, I HAVE TO ASSUME YOU KNOW THAT I KNOW HOW TO PLAY THE GUITAR... IT MEANS YOU DON'T HAVE TO PROVE YOUR WORTH EVERY SONG"

"I didn't realise that underneath the red was a monster fucking top, because the finish was so thick. But that was good luck for me. So I made the guy an offer through David and, by the time I had crossed the street and was getting into my car, David called back and said he'd take it. I went back and picked it up and that was that – the beginning of Lazarus."

LOOKING BACK

With the right tools for the job, Joe and his friends set about making his 45th album. This is the kind of longevity that gives artists the freedom to be their authentic selves and, in Joe's case, to shun expectations about living up to his 'guitar hero' reputation.

"The good thing about having made 44 albums in 20 years is that if you're buying a Joe Bonamassa record now, I have to assume that you know I know how to play the guitar before you purchase it," he says. "I'm trying not to sound flippant but it allows you to truncate the solos to where you don't have to prove your worth every fucking song. I like the solo on *Why Does It Take So Long To Say Goodbye*. It's got a cool tone. It's dark and chewy, and it doesn't sound like a typical Les Paul but it still sounds like me."

This isn't Joe's only album of 2020 either. His 44th record was a reissue of that debut LP *A New Day Yesterday* but, rather than simply repackage the original, he went back and re-recorded all the vocals, as well as some of the guitar parts.

"It's nice that my 44th and 45th albums are coming out almost tangentially, and that they're my first and my latest. It's a good microscope to look through. You can say, 'Yeah, I've improved over the past 20 years'.

"I re-sang the reissue, there are some new guitars and it's been remixed. There are new guitars on there not because I didn't like what I played the first time but simply because some of the tapes had been lost. Kevin was like, 'Oh, the solo's gone, there's no solo on this song'. And I'm like, 'What do you mean?!' So I thought it would actually be cool to revisit some of those. I think it's an interesting concept for a reissue record, because a lot of people will just remaster them… they tidy up the floor but we actually put a whole new roof on it."

As for album 46? Despite the pandemic, it seems that the whole idea of writing albums dedicated to iconic cities and sounds has lit something of a fire under Joe.

"Assuming it comes off given everything that's going on, we have studio time booked in New York in January next year," he says. "There's a bunch of songs that didn't make this record purely because they didn't sound British enough. They're good songs but they didn't fit this record. So we're going to revisit those and write some new stuff for an album we'll record in New York. My concept is 'subway rigs': no cartage, no road cases, just doing what I used to do 20 years ago, with a gigbag, a Strat or a Les Paul, and a brown Deluxe or Deluxe Reverb. You go with what you've got. When your palette isn't infinite, making a record like that can really test the songs." G

***Royal Tea* is out now on Provogue/Mascot and J&R Adventures**

OPPOSITE Bonamassa on stage at the Ryman playing his 1960 Les Paul 'Johnny B'

ABOVE Joe playing former Deep Purple guitarist Tommy Bolin's instantly recognisable 1960 Burst. Head to guitar.com/live to hear it in action

Bonamassa &

THE BEAST

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

Bernie Marsden's main squeeze is one of the most famous of all the fabled 1959 Les Paul Standards and its role in Whitesnake mega-hits is well documented. But what's it really like to get up close and personal with The Beast? And how does it stack up compared to other Bursts? We ask a man who has played a few…

"Certain pieces of gear – and it doesn't have to be a '59 Les Paul – have the extra 10 per cent," Joe Bonamassa opines. "So say there's a Les Paul you want to buy from the Custom Shop or from the US production line. If you take 10 and go through them, you'll go, 'That one's good, that one's good, that one's good… that one's exceptional'.

"I don't know why. It's the same wood, the same pickups, maybe even built by the same person. But the cumulative effect of the magic tree or whatever it is – who knows, it can even be the same billet of wood – means that there are some that are just exceptional and have the extra 10 or 15 per cent that others don't. Bernie's guitar happens to be exceptional. And I don't know why!

"I have guitars close to it in serial number. His is 1914 and I have 1948, 1949 and 1951, and I used to own 1953 too. But Bernie's is earlier in the run, and the guitars towards the 1940s and the 1950s in terms of their serial number have a different top. The earlier ones have a similar top – 1928 has a similar top to Bernie's, so it's a different batch. But his just has this X-factor."

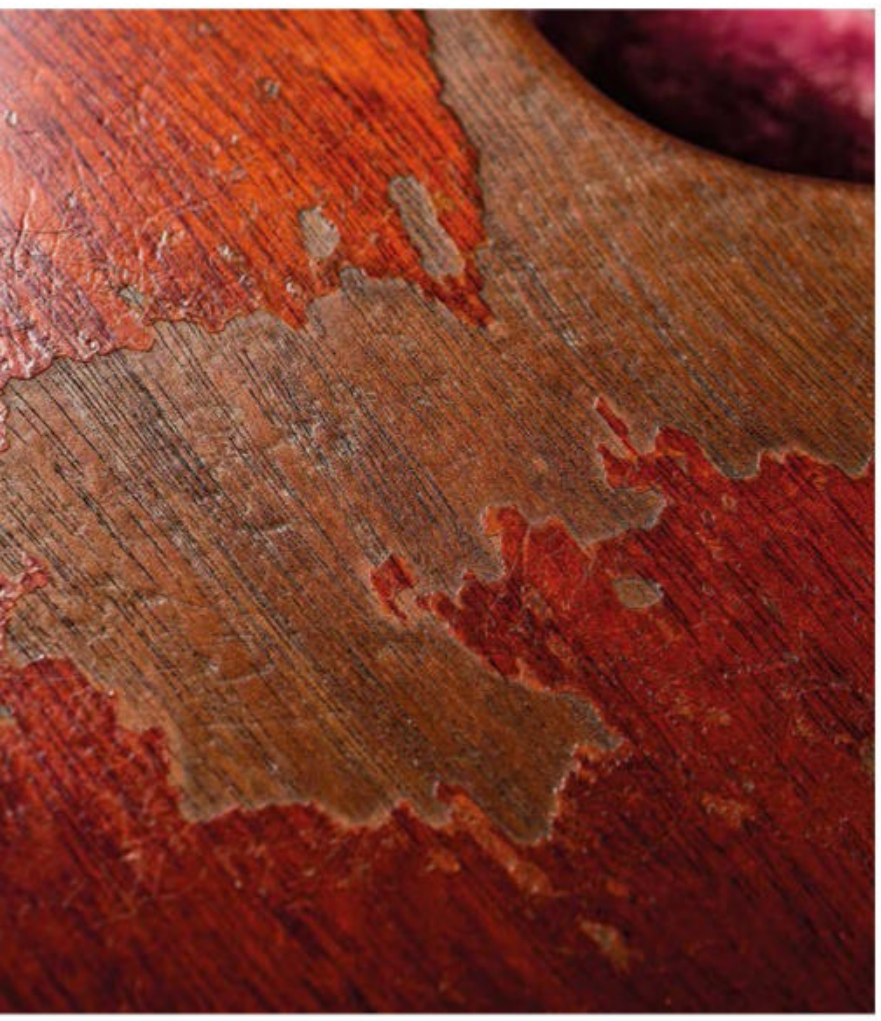
HAVE BURST, WILL TRAVEL

Given how much road mileage The Beast has racked up in its lifetime, it's remarkable that the guitar has never suffered a neck break. Bonamassa agrees. "It's got big old frets on it, he's played it to death. Hell, he used to check it under the fucking plane and it still has the headstock attached – amazing!

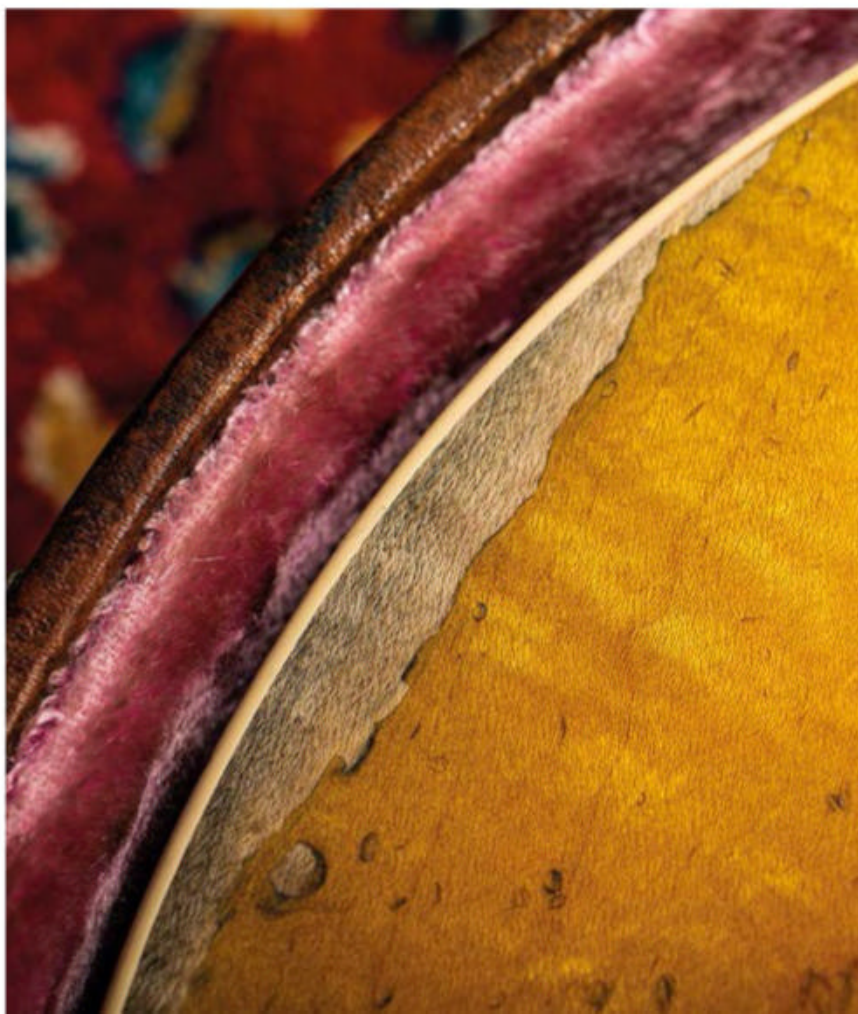
"He once gave it to the hotel concierge. He was like, 'Hold onto this while we go and have breakfast and we'll come and get it when the car arrives'. I was like, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa. Stop right there. I'll babysit the damn guitar – and we're not putting it in the trunk either!'

"You gotta learn from Gary Moore – he got rear-ended! And your guitar's still in the original case! I'm like, 'Dude, let me get you a Protector case or something – let's not test fate over and over!'" G

RHYTHM
TREBLE



Les Paul



“BERNIE’S GUITAR IS EXCEPTIONAL. IT JUST HAS THIS X-FACTOR”

QUIET STORM

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Bernie Marsden's love of molten electric blues is well documented but over the past couple of decades he's added some spectacular vintage acoustics to his guitar collection. We check out the highlights and find out how he was bitten by the unplugged bug

For even the most devout worshipper at the altar of the electric guitar, there is something deeply personal about the connection between flesh, wood and string that occurs when playing a great acoustic instrument. The resonance, the spectral halo of harmonics that surrounds the notes, and the lack of places to hide – this is guitar playing at its most exposed, its most direct and its most visceral.

The strange events of 2020 have seen many of us reconnect with our acoustic guitars and come to appreciate them like never before. Although he's best known for wielding his 1959 Les Paul Standard on such hard-rock anthems as *Here I Go Again* and *Fool For Your Loving*, Bernie Marsden is no exception. Though he doesn't consider himself an acoustic specialist and self-effacingly cites Martin Simpson as an example of a "real" acoustic guitar player, Bernie's collection contains an array of spine-tingling vintage acoustics – and he certainly knows his way around them.

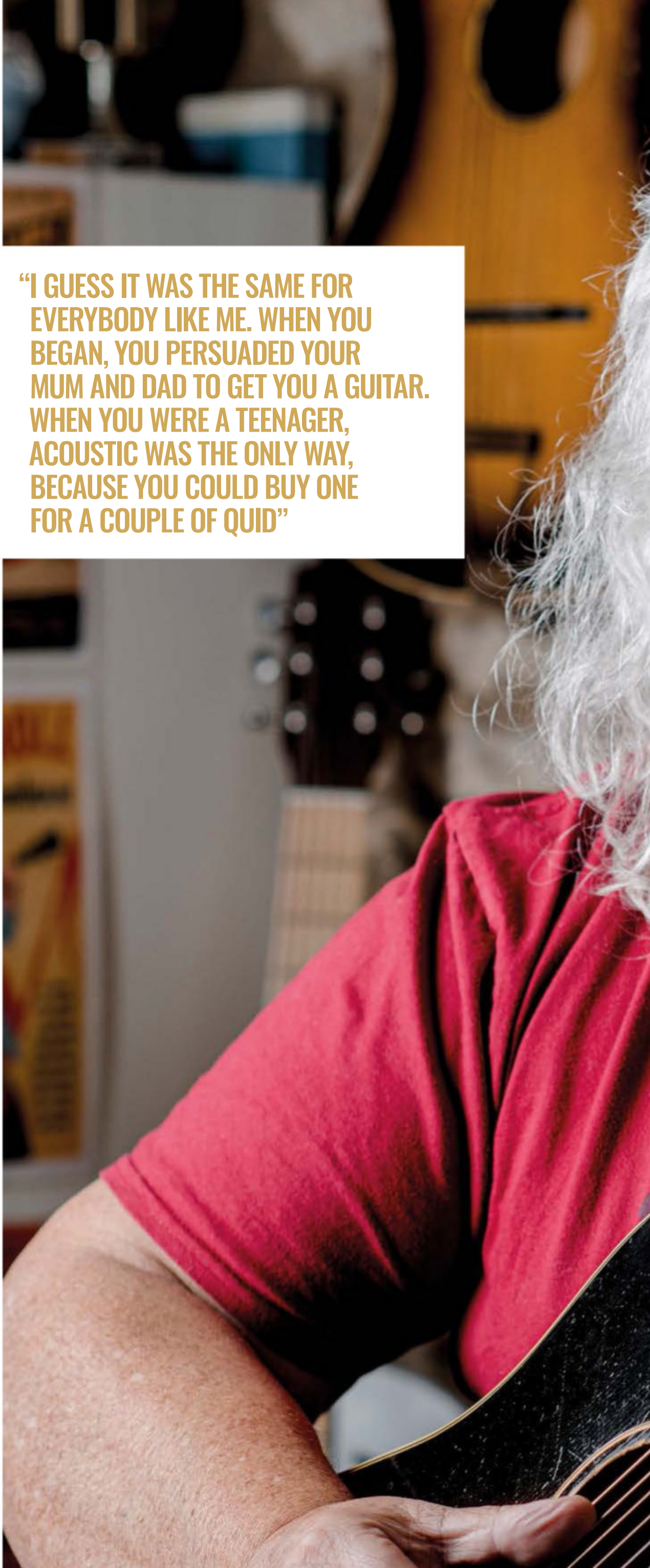
We pay the former Whitesnake man a visit at his home in Buckinghamshire, where he ruminates on his past and explains that it wasn't always this way. "I guess it was the same for everybody like me," he says. "When you began, you persuaded your mum and dad to get you a guitar. When you were a teenager, acoustic was the only way, because you could buy one of those for a couple of quid, a fiver maybe. That's what happened to most of us. I was never really bothered about acoustics as I've never thought about myself as a very good acoustic player."

SIREN SONG

Several decades and a hell of a lot of record sales later, Marsden was the proud owner of a fine electric guitar collection. But a friend and guitar shop owner in Pennsylvania managed to lure him down the unplugged path.

"Jim Singleton of Jim's Guitars in America just pulled me in to the beauty of how well made these instruments were," says Bernie, "and that the collectability was maybe going to become something. A lot of people like me were overlooking them to get the next Firebird or the next Les Paul Junior or the next Stratocaster. Jim kept saying, 'Play this'. I went to his house and, in his basement, he had a couple of beautiful J-50s and J-45s. He said to me, 'You know, they're not expensive – I've got two in my shop at the moment'. And they weren't expensive. Not really. And what you get is this musical instrument that's been hand-made by two or three people, whether it was in the 1930s or the 1950s. And that's how I really got into acoustic guitars."

"I GUESS IT WAS THE SAME FOR EVERYBODY LIKE ME. WHEN YOU BEGAN, YOU PERSUADED YOUR MUM AND DAD TO GET YOU A GUITAR. WHEN YOU WERE A TEENAGER, ACOUSTIC WAS THE ONLY WAY, BECAUSE YOU COULD BUY ONE FOR A COUPLE OF QUID"



ABOVE This beautiful Gibson L-5 – one of only five of its type shipped in 1955 – was discovered decades later in a small sheet-music store in Cheltenham, and helped kickstart Bernie's interest in vintage acoustics and archtops

Old Gibsons were the gateway drug. Soon Bernie had one of his own, a 1955 Gibson L-5. "I found the L-5 and that turned me," he says. "I thought, 'I'll get a couple more of these'. Then about 25 years ago, I started – not looking for them but not dismissing them too quickly either. I soon realised that, instead of four or five, I had about 20. Then I became a bit of an acoustic demon. That's why I have the Martins and things that come up so rarely. But acoustics-wise, I'm a johnny-come-lately, really. I enjoy playing them. There's a J-45 around the house and I leave one in the studio."

Though gigs aren't exactly plentiful for anyone right now, when Bernie takes to the stage with an acoustic guitar, he tends to leave the collector's pieces at home and opt for something more modern.

"I'm endorsing Alvarez at the moment," he reveals. "I haven't had the chance to promote them that much because of the lockdown but they're working out and the guys I've been working with have been very helpful. I've got a six-string and a nice 12-string as well. You don't want to take the vintage acoustics on the road. They're too good to risk damaging or losing. And I don't want to start carving them up to put pickups in either. I know you can do it subtly these days but I don't need to. I've got perfectly good modern guitars with pickups that sound great through PAs. So I'm kind of split between the two."

OLD SOUL

We often remark that great old guitars sound like records, so we suspect that Bernie – a man whose vast vinyl collection speaks of a deep love for classic pop, rock and blues recordings – has enjoyed similar lightbulb moments on his journey into the world of vintage acoustics. Sometimes it can even be quite eerie when you pick up a vintage guitar for the first time only to find that there's an uncanny familiarity to its voice.

LEFT Bernie picked up this 1930s L-00 in the US about 10 years ago. “I’ve recorded a few things with it,” he says. “It’s good for fingerpicking, that’s for sure. You can imagine going through Mississippi in the 1930s with it hanging on your back. It weighs nothing”

BELOW Bernie calls this 1930s Gibson L-37 ‘John’, after Piedmont blues legend John Jackson, who once played this very guitar when he visited Marsden’s house

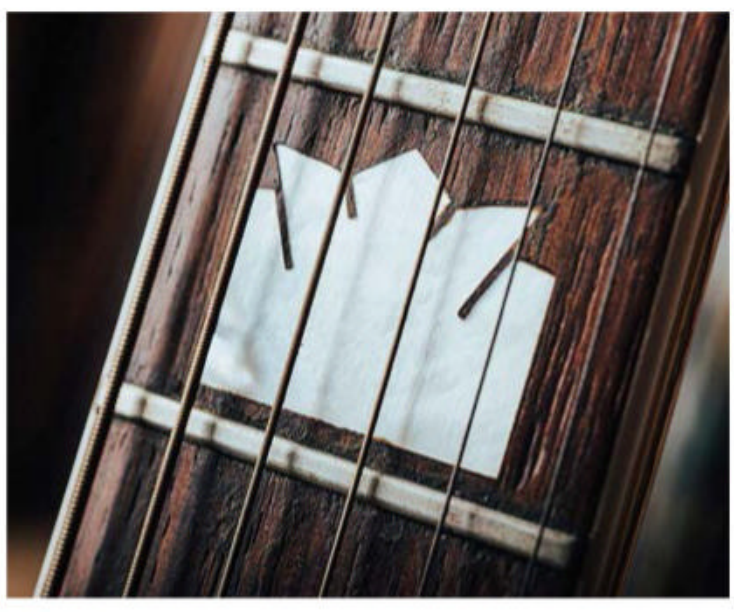
BEAKER

200 CLUB

One of the most breathtaking acoustics in Bernie's collection is this sunburst J-200 with a unique double-pickguard emblazoned with the name Dewey Dillon. "Sadly he's now gone but I found out who Dewey Dillon was," says Bernie. "Somebody saw the guitar in a magazine in the US and his family contacted me, when he was still alive and in his eighties. It was made for his 21st birthday in 1959, commissioned by his mother. He played it a lot and they have pictures of him with it.

"I found it in a shop in England, a long time ago. There are no clues on the case as to how it got to this country. It's one of those things you don't see very often. At some point, the tune-o-matic was added but a very long time ago. It's a great guitar. I've used it on demo sessions mainly. It records great. It's just a lovely piece of 1950s craftsmanship."

Bernie pulls out another 1950s J-200, this time bone stock but no less beautiful. "I got that in Germany two years ago," he says. "It's not quite as ornate but it's a lovely guitar."



THIS PAGE This 1960s Stella tenor guitar is a fun pawnshop prize

OPPOSITE The authentic dustbowl flavour of this all-mahogany 1940 Martin 00-17 was employed to great effect on *Linin' Track* from Bernie's 2014 LP *Shine*. "I use that one a fair bit," he says of the Martin. "It's always knocking around the house. A good songwriting guitar."

Marsden agrees. "You go into a non-standard tuning and play a Steve Stills song and it's instant," he says. "You say, 'Oh, he was using one of these' – and you find out that he was. Or James Taylor playing his old J-50. You grew up with that stuff without thinking 'what a beautiful acoustic guitar' but, subliminally, it was going into your mind."

By the time Bernie was in the studio during the heady Whitesnake days, acoustic guitars took a backseat to humbuckers and Marshalls. When it came to tracking acoustic parts, he rarely used a guitar of his own.

"I think I had a Yamaha back then," he says. "Micky [Moody] had the acoustic guitars so he'd bring them and I'd play his. Especially if we double-tracked, we'd just use the same guitar. Funnily enough they sounded quite different, between the two of us. I think he had a D-18 – the Whitesnake stuff would've been done on Micky's Martin. I didn't have anything as luxurious as he had then; I was spending my money on Firebirds!"

Martin & Co.
EST. 1833

SIGNATURE MODEL

This European-made 1920s Martin Coletti parlour guitar was given to Bernie by the family of a local slide guitarist in Buckinghamshire who had been following Marsden throughout his career. After getting it back into good enough shape to play, Bernie decided it would be decorated with the signatures of his many famous guitarist friends and others he's encountered on the road.

The Coletti was first signed by legendary bluesman David 'Honeyboy' Edwards, before being adorned with the autographs of Gary Moore, Peter Green, Graham Nash, Johnny Winter, Billy Gibbons and dozens of other music luminaries. "I've saved the headstock either for Eric or for Jeff," says Bernie.

45 RPM

It's fair to say that Bernie Marsden is a fan of the Gibson J-45. He currently owns three – 1953, 1959 and 1963 models – but there could have been more. "I actually sold one to a pal of mine, although it was a J-50, to be honest with you. When I got the first one, I was knocked out with it. Somebody said I should compare one from the '50s with one from the '60s, 'cause they're totally different'. I said, 'How can it be that different?' And it was that different, and yet it was still a J-45, which is kind of crazy if you think about it.

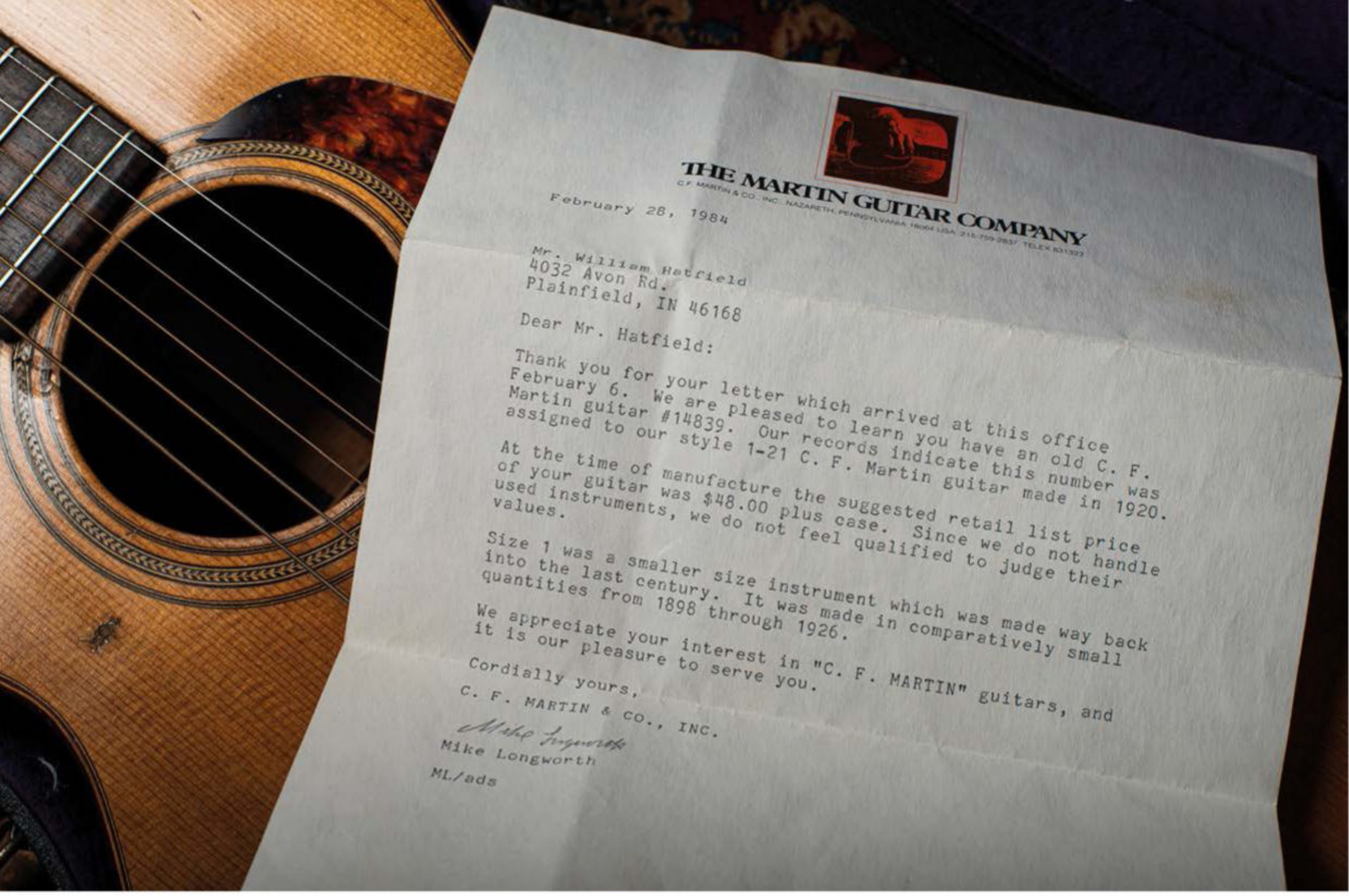
"I had a J-50 with the adjustable bridge and I sold that to a friend who was mad keen to have an early 1960s Gibson. When I sold that to him, I went out and got the third J-45, which is the '59. I'm pretty well versed in J-45s and they all do something different.

"They're so great to record with. Once you get it recorded with the right microphone, they just stay in the mix and it's your building block. There's some sort of sonic simplicity about them. They stand the test of time absolutely wonderfully. I believe there are producers in Nashville who won't allow anything other than a certain period of J-45 to be on a record. If the session guy comes in with another guitar, they won't have it!"

1963

1959

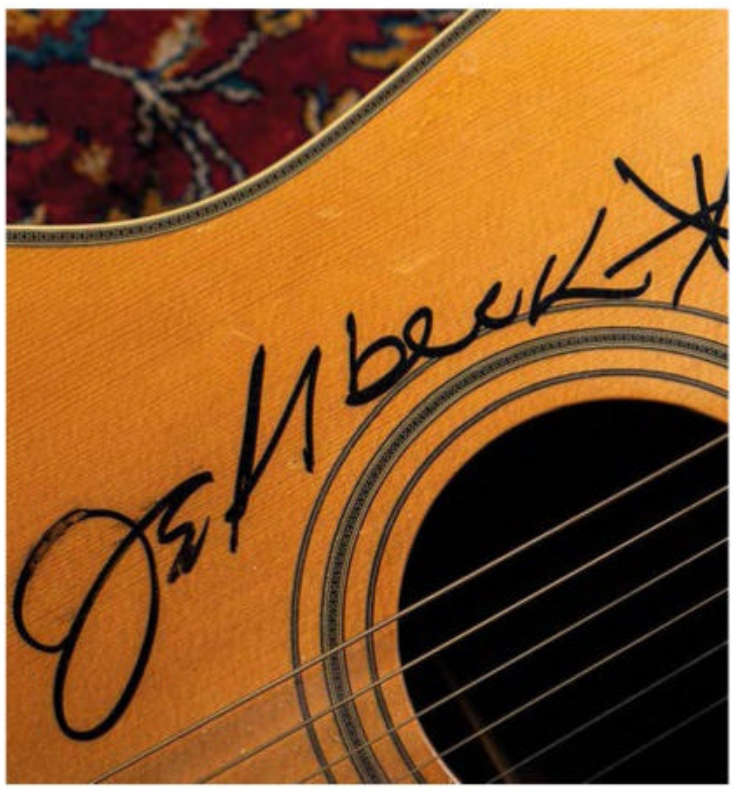
1953



This 100-year-old Martin Style 1-21 model has an almost supernaturally large sound for its size and comes with a letter of appraisal from former Martin historian Mike Longworth, dated 28 February 1984

Though Bernie still has a penchant for a nice Firebird, these days he's just as likely to be eyeing up pre-war archtops and century-old parlour guitars. And if the snippets of guitar playing he treats us to during our photoshoot are anything to go by, there's plenty of new music and inspiration still to be found in these wonderful old machines. G

A selection of Bernie Marsden's collection goes under the hammer at Gardiner Houlgate Guitar Auctions on 9-10 December. Visit guitar-auctions.co.uk for more. Take an even deeper dive into Bernie's guitars in *Tales Of Tone And Volume*, a deluxe hardback available now via berniemarsden.com



ABOVE RIGHT Bernie's 1982 Yamaha was signed by Jeff Beck after they jammed at a party

RIGHT Bernie's all-mahogany early 1960s Gibson LG-0 used to reside at his parents' house, where he would use it to play songs for his mum

PRO-MOD

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Los Angeles

Sasha Dunable makes some scarily good guitars in Glendale California. We had one through as a trade in a while back and were so impressed that we contacted Sasha and got him to build some for us.

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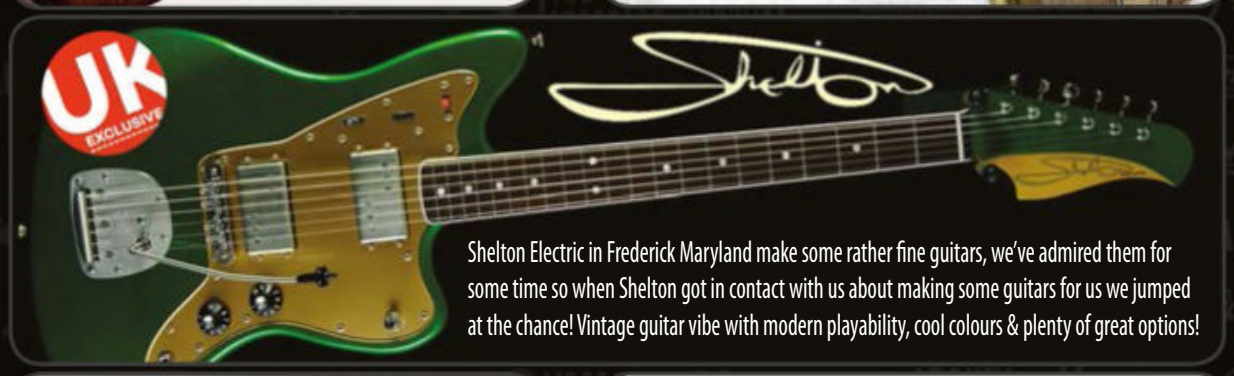
Leading supplier of all things Fender and Squier, whether you're after a Strat or Tele, Jaguar or Jazzmaster, Precision or Jazz, you're sure to find it at Coda Music.



Shelton

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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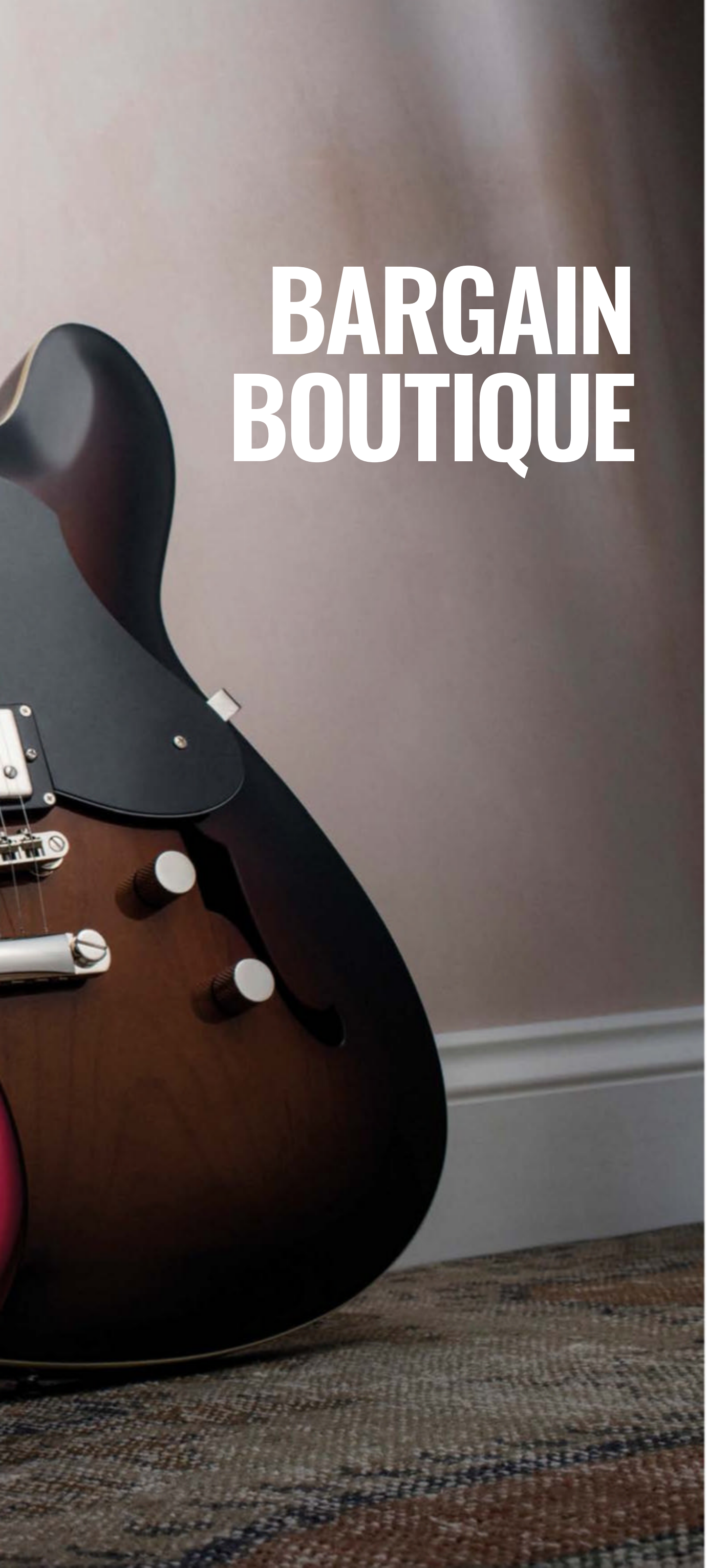


BARGAIN BOUTIQUE

FANO
OMNIS GF6 & MG6

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

One of the biggest names on the US boutique guitar scene launches its most affordable instruments to date

Mention boutique guitars and one of the first names that comes to people's minds will probably be Fano. But with prices for the brand's made-to-order American Alt de Facto beauties starting well in excess of £2,000, ownership is an exclusive club. That's where the new Omnis range comes in, supplanting the Standard series as the catalogue's most affordable point of entry.

Aesthetically, these new instruments are not instantly distinguishable from their US-made siblings. Although Dennis Fano is no longer at the company, all four models in the line are derived from his current or past designs. But they come in below that magic thousand-pound mark thanks primarily to one revolutionary feature: a 'Made in China' stamp on the back of the headstock.

You get a host of custom options when you order directly from Fano's Arizona factory, covering everything from the electronics and hardware to aged finishes. But none of that is available here: keeping it simple and standard is all part of the price-cutting strategy. What you do get is proper tonewoods (all models have alder bodies and maple necks), Fano-designed pickups and that distinctive and much-imitated two-tone stepped headstock design.

We have two models on test here: the Omnis GF6, a semi-acoustic equipped with humbuckers and an offset body shape that's clearly inspired by the Fender Starcaster; and the Omnis MG6, which looks like a Mustang but with P-90s, a Strat-style bridge and the same full 25.5-inch scale length as the semi.

We're immediately taken by the neck on the GF6, which is a moderately chunky C-shape with a smooth satin finish and cream binding. The front of the body is also bound, and it's an archtop but only just, while the flat back is made from four strips of timber.

The tuners are marked "Fano Deluxe" but they're generic units, as are the tune-o-matic bridge and stoptail at the other end. For a guitar made partly of air, it's pretty heavy at almost 4kg.

Lounge act: the GF6's smoky Tobacco Burst finish gives it a moody vintage vibe

The Mustang-ness of the MG6 is mostly superficial but the guitar does have some of the stripped-back, unpretentious feel of Fender's short-scale classic. The back-angled headstock looks identical to that of the GF6 and the neck profile is only fractionally slimmer but the unbound neck gives this solidbody a much more punky feel.

The front and back body chamfering is very much in the Stratocaster style, while the Strat-type bridge looks ever so slightly old-fashioned on a guitar of this type but is probably a prudent bet for tuning stability.

Dennis Fano's Novo Guitars proved with its Rivolta sub-brand that you can manufacture US-designed instruments in Asia to a high standard – and in those terms, our first impressions of the Omnis are just as reassuring for the company that still bears his name. Both necks are tidy fits, the finishes are close to immaculate and the hardware feels robust. The frets are a tad scratchy, we'd have liked softer fingerboard edges, and there's an odd dark patch on the treble side around the 13th fret of the MG6. But nothing here will cause major issues.

IN USE

The GF6 steps up first to reveal an acoustic tone that's warm and even, with little in the way of midrange clank. As an unplugged sofa-based noodling machine, it'll do nicely. But of course, the real test here comes in those humbuckers.

The bridge pickup's overall tonality holds no real surprises, with its balance of upper-midrange snarl and low-end beef landing it squarely in ES-335 territory. A lively ring to the response means this is not a natural choice for tight riffing, but it sustains for

Neck and neck: both guitars feature bolt-on maple necks with pau ferro 'boards

Stamp of approval: the neckplates feature Fano's signature F

Seeing double: the GF6 is a dual-humbucker affair

Watch your step: both guitars boast Fano's stepped headstock design

Strong and stable: the MG6's Strat-style bridge should keep its tuning in check

Pick me up: the MG6 features P-90s in both the neck and bridge position

weeks and there's plenty of expressive character here for soulful rockers and blues grimacers.

Flipping to the middle position introduces the usual two-pickup twinkle but the output level still feels quite high, so you might want to pull back a few notches on the volume control for clean strumming and arpeggios. That's even more pronounced with the neck pickup on its own, which is great for buttery jazz runs but too full in the low end for anything light and breezy.

This is a modern guitar built upon a traditional design philosophy and that compromise is evident in the lack of access to the upper frets. It isn't great, because the neck-join area of the body is just so chunky, but it could have been worse if not for the thoroughly 21st-century curved heel.

That's also the case with our solidbody, the MG6, which feels distinctly weighty at a little more than 4kg and whose acoustic tone is, frankly, not very exciting. But you can always rely on a good pair of P-90s to liven things up, right? Yes and no.

These are fairly hot pickups and the resulting clean tones are rather dark and airless for what is for all intents and purposes a two-pickup Strat. In all three positions, it's happier running through an amp with a decent amount of headroom to let its blooming low frequencies breathe. But even then it's by no means a chimer.

The good news is that you get some classic P-90 attack. Give it a little bit of overdrive to play with and the MG6 will reward you with thick yet articulate lead tones all the way up the neck. It has that boutique smoothness and we're left with the distinct impression that this thing was designed to rock.

If you're used to offset-waist guitars with 'floating' bridges, then the sheer brutality of the six-screw unit fitted here might come as something of a shock; with the back of the bridge sitting flush against the body, it's not ideal for gentle wobbles but it can properly divebomb and – as long as you don't really overdo it – it won't whack the whole thing horribly out of tune in the process.

There's no great mystery to what Fano has accomplished here. In terms of overall quality and value for money, these guitars are more than good enough to uphold the company's much-respected name but not so good as to risk putting the American workshop out of business. A good job solidly (and semi-solidly) done.

Apple of your eye: the MG6 is a looker in Candy Apple Red

KEY FEATURES

GF6
PRICE £989 (inc. padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string semi-hollow electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Offset double-cutaway semi-hollow alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 9.5-12" compound radius bound pau ferro fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets and composite nut
HARDWARE Tune-o-matic bridge with stop tailpiece, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Fano humbuckers, master volume and tone, three-way pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 24.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.8kg/8.4lb
FINISH Tobacco Burst (as reviewed), Sonic Blue, Bull Black
LEFT-HANDERS Not yet
CONTACT coda-music.com, fanoguitars.com

8/10 **A powerful semi-acoustic with a sophisticated feel and plenty of bite**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Squier Classic Vibe Starcaster **£429**
Reverend Club King **£879**
Gordon Smith GS Deluxe Semi Solid **£1,299**

KEY FEATURES

MG6
PRICE £849 (inc. padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Offset double-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 9.5-12" compound radius pau ferro fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets and composite nut
HARDWARE Six-screw vintage-style vibrato bridge with bent steel saddles, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Fano P-90s, master volume and tone, three-way pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.8mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.7mm at first fret, 23.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.1kg/8.9lb
FINISH Candy Apple Red (as reviewed), Olympic White, Sonic Blue
LEFT-HANDERS Not yet

8/10 **A Mustang-type in shape only, this is a smooth and beefy rock axe**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender Player Mustang 90 **£549**
G&L Tribute Fallout **£379**
Fender Limited Korina Offset Tele **£1,129**

PERFECTLY FORMED?

TAYLOR
GTE URBAN ASH

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

If travel guitars sound too small but you find full-size acoustics unwieldy, Taylor's new Grand Theater might be the highly evolved solution you've been waiting for

Despite the many challenges facing the world of music and beyond, this year has seen a flurry of new designs from Taylor Guitars. Some of these, including the soundport-equipped Builder's Edition 816ce, blur the boundaries between production-line models and luthier-built custom instruments. Others, such as the recent American Dream guitars, have instead adopted a more utilitarian aesthetic that chimes with the adversity of the times. But Taylor's final reveal of the year is something quite different.

In previous years, Taylor has unveiled new models at media launch events in San Diego and Nashville. Because that isn't an option right now, the brand opted for a live video stream instead. Squinting at a laptop screen on a rainy autumn day in South Wales isn't quite as glamorous as the aforementioned stateside jaunts but there was a fun and interactive twist to keep spirits up. Prior to the event, the journalists and influencers in attendance received padlocked brown AeroCases, with the combination for the locks kept secret until the live stream took place.

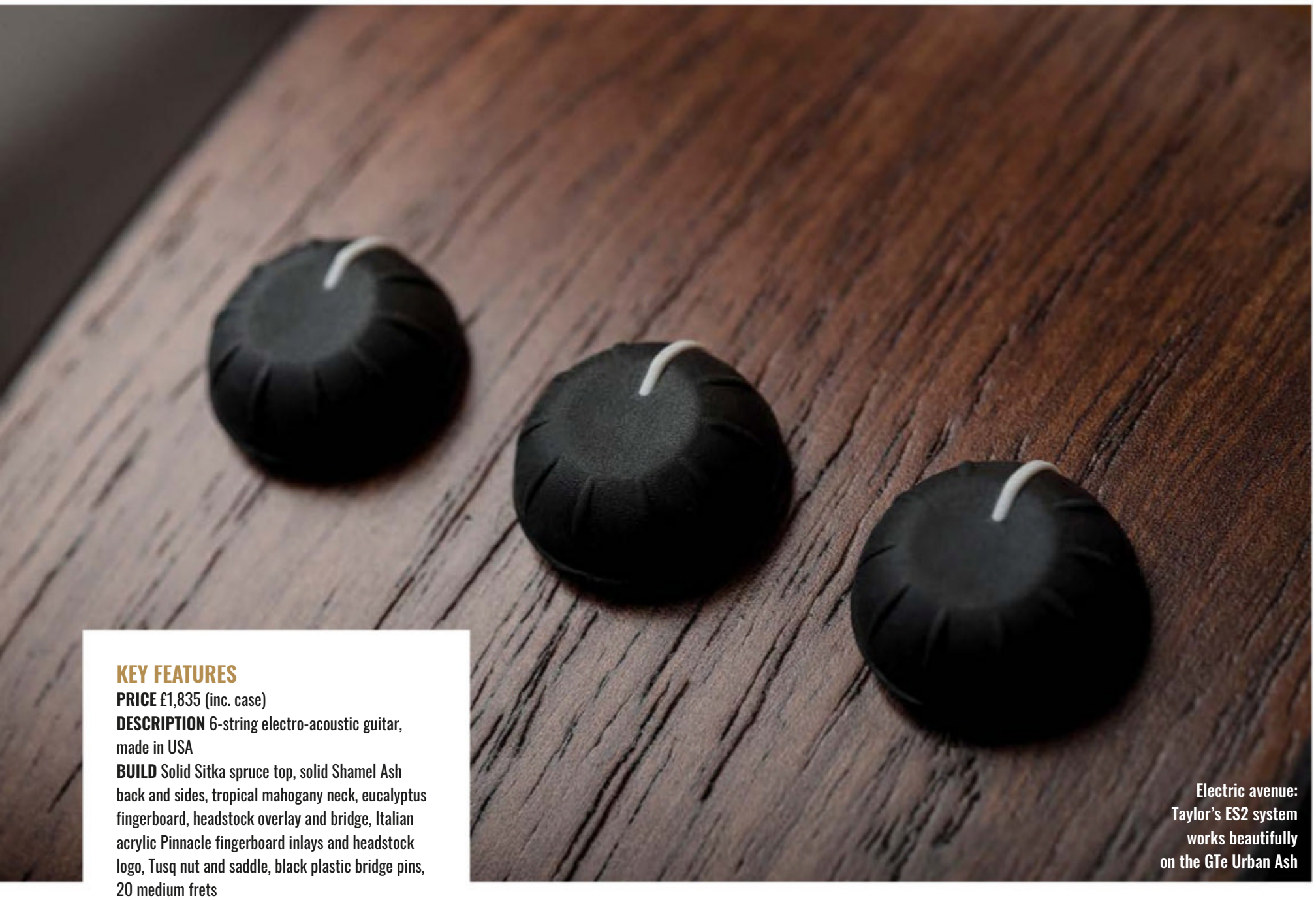
Taylor's AeroCase deserves praise itself for being lightweight and easily portable without sacrificing durability or protection. Once it was unlocked and unzipped, inside, we found the brand-new Taylor GT, or more specifically the GTe, as our model comes equipped with onboard electronics.

Short for Grand Theater, the GT is a compact flat-top created from the ground up by Taylor's master guitar designer Andy Powers. Sitting somewhere between a Grand Concert and a GS Mini, the body shape borrows the curves of the Grand Orchestra jumbo but scales them down, with a width of 15 inches at the lower bout. It's almost the same width as a Grand Concert but the GT's body length is shorter.

Taylor claims that the GT offers the most comfortable playing experience of all its USA-made solid-wood guitars. The key to this is a scale length of 24.125 inches and slightly condensed fret spacing. Powers says this equates to playing with a capo on the first fret of a 25.5-inch scale guitar and makes the supplied set of .012-.053 Elixir Phosphor Bronze strings feel more like a set of 11s.

There's a focus on player-friendliness, then. But how do you engineer it so that a smaller-bodied instrument punches above its weight in sonic terms? Visible through the GT's soundhole is a new cantilevered asymmetrical bracing design that Taylor is calling C-Class. Conceived as a way to bolster the low-frequency response, it's said to equip the GT with the sustain, projection and intonation benefits of the V-Class architecture that continues to provide a wellspring of inspiration in El Cajon.

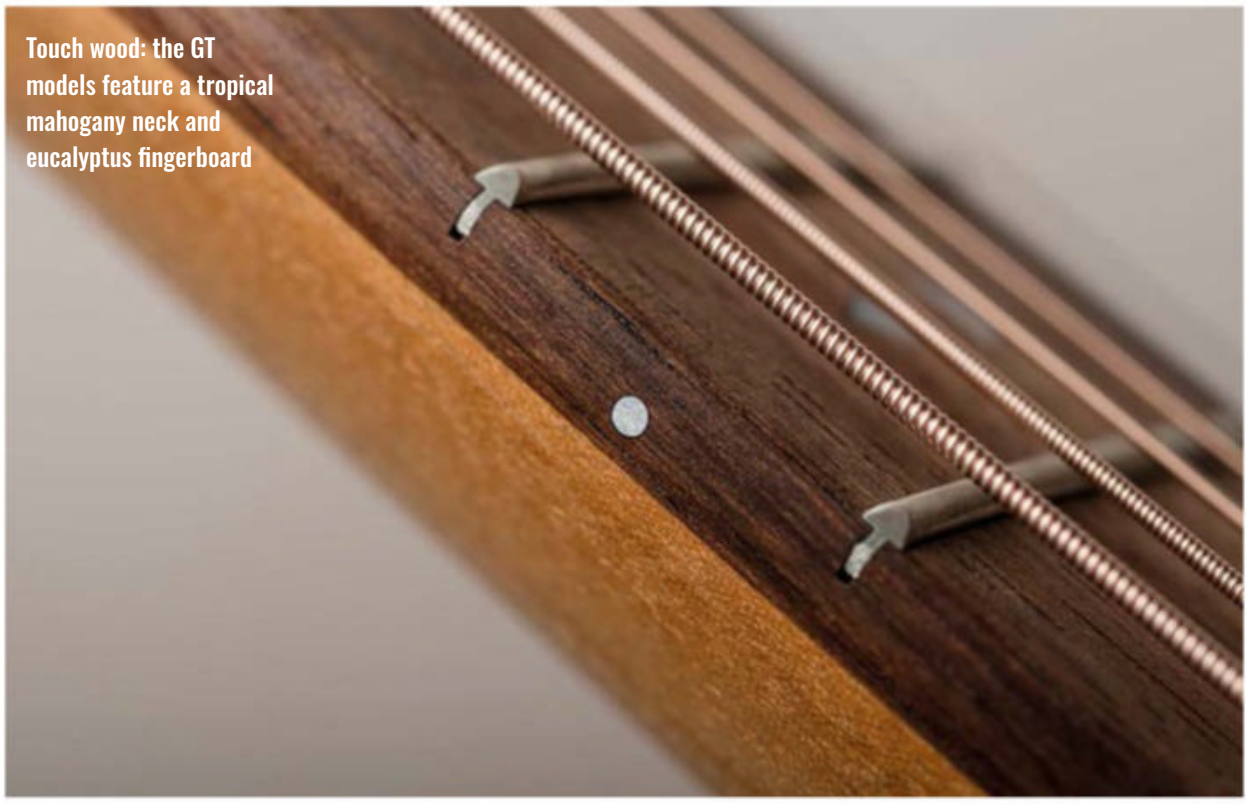
The GT's Sitka spruce top appears in combination with sustainably sourced Southern Californian Urban (Shamel) Ash on the back and sides, while the fretboard, bridge and peghead overlay are made from fumed eucalyptus. This material was also a feature of the recent American Dream series and, though its streaked appearance resembles the West African ebony that Bob Taylor is working to conserve, it has a faster feel, more like a rosewood-board electric.



Electric avenue: Taylor's ES2 system works beautifully on the GTe Urban Ash

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,835 (inc. case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string electro-acoustic guitar, made in USA
BUILD Solid Sitka spruce top, solid Shamel Ash back and sides, tropical mahogany neck, eucalyptus fingerboard, headstock overlay and bridge, Italian acrylic Pinnacle fingerboard inlays and headstock logo, Tusq nut and saddle, black plastic bridge pins, 20 medium frets
HARDWARE Taylor Nickel Mini tuners
ELECTRONICS Taylor Expression System 2 with treble, bass and volume controls
SCALE LENGTH 24.125"/613mm
NECK WIDTH 43.8mm at nut, 53.0mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.2mm at first fret, 22.9mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 36.6mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.67kg/3.7lb
FINISH Water-based matte
LEFT-HANDERS No
OPTIONS GT Urban Ash model with no electronics (£1,619)
CONTACT taylorguitars.com



Touch wood: the GT models feature a tropical mahogany neck and eucalyptus fingerboard

And although it looks like the GT sports a classic Taylor bridge, like so many elements of this instrument, the bridge is unique and has been rescaled appropriately for this model.

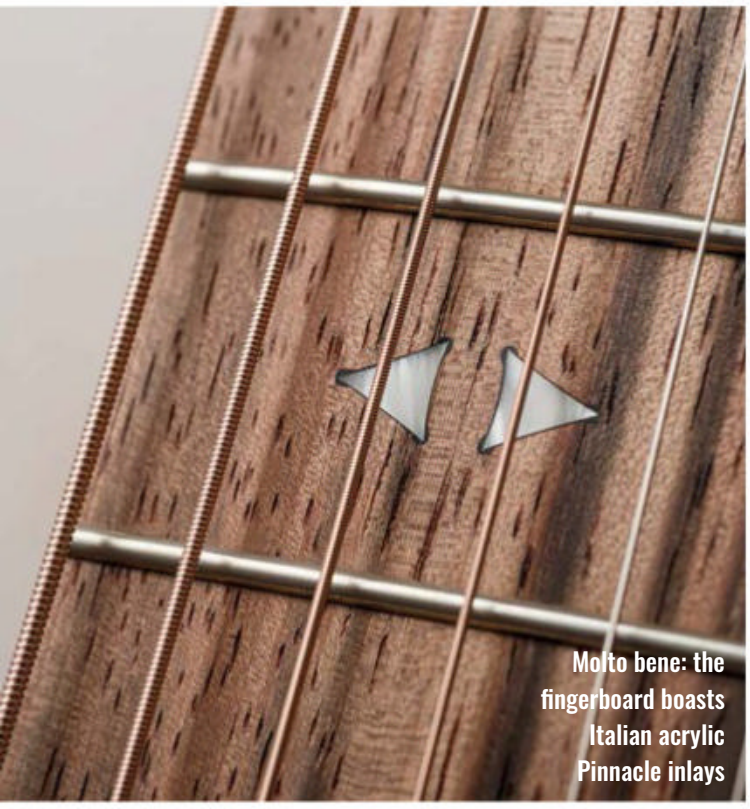
The natural-finished tropical mahogany neck provides a visual contrast to the rich Urban Sienna stain on the back and sides but this is a guitar unashamed to show its workings, with no attempts made to hide the joins at the heel and headstock. Similarly, the GT's water-based matte finish is thin enough to preserve the texture of the grain and the adornments are simple: a thin strip of koa in the three-ring rosette, a single line of black purfling around the top and Italian acrylic Pinnacle inlays in the eucalyptus 'board.

The neck features a classy new profile developed specifically for the GT, with soft shoulders and a hint of a V in a carve that never gets in the way but provides support when you need it. Only the slightly sharp edges on this early review model's nut detract from a build that's as precise as you'd expect from a USA Taylor.

IN USE

Andy Powers has used the term "Goldilocks" in connection with this guitar on several occasions – the implication here being that it's just right – and it's certainly hard to argue with the GT's approachable feel.

But just because it feels like sliding into a comfortable old pair of trainers doesn't mean the GT encourages complacency. If anything, the opposite is true. The GT's relaxed playability encourages those of us who aren't acoustic virtuosi to be a little more ambitious. The wound G, for example, is considerably easier to bend than it is on an acoustic with a more conventional scale length, so you can approach solos much as you might on an electric guitar strung with a plain G.



Molto bene: the fingerboard boasts Italian acrylic Pinnacle inlays

Precision design: master guitar designer Andy Powers' signature adorns the interior

One of a kind: though it appears standard, the bridge has been modified to fit the GT

Sonically, the C-Class bracing has a lot in common with V-Class. Chords have a long and even decay and there's impressive vibrancy. Single notes in higher registers hang in the air for longer than expected, harmonic content is plentiful and, even when using deep open tunings, the intonation remains superb – again encouraging us to push the boundaries of our acoustic repertoire. And although there's no cutaway, the geometry is such that it's possible to reach a goodly proportion of those upper frets without too much trouble or discomfort.

If recent Andy Powers creations such as the Grand Pacific challenged our perception of what a Taylor acoustic guitar sounds like, the Grand Theater is more on brand, especially in terms of its present, percussive character when strumming first-position chords with a pick. If that's all you need an acoustic guitar for, it's nothing to be ashamed of, and whether you're capturing it with a microphone, going direct to desk via the excellent onboard ES2 electronics or using a blend of both signals, the GTe has the muscle to drive a track along in a full-band arrangement. Unaccompanied, the projection is impressive for a modern instrument of its size, without there being any danger of overpowering a singer.

Dig in hard and there's a slightly metallic zing to the trebles but move over to fingerstyle and hidden depths reveal themselves, both literally and figuratively, as a softer touch unlocks a sweeter woodiness and the guitar takes on a rootsier accent. We'd certainly be interested to hear what one of these instruments sounds like when it has some miles on the clock – like any new acoustic guitar, this is just the start of its journey and its voice will mature over many hours of playing time. It's also interesting to speculate about how different wood combinations might sound in the context of this form factor and bracing pattern, and we suspect that the GT Urban Ash will be followed eventually by a GT Mahogany, a GT Koa and so on.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the GT is simply its cost. Laminated materials and Mexican manufacturing ensured that, in terms of affordability, Taylor's small-bodied Baby and GS Mini sat squarely in the Goldilocks zone for the hundreds of thousands of players who have bought them to date. Although it's travel-friendly, the GT is a professional-grade guitar, and an all-solid-wood US-built instrument naturally commands a significantly higher investment. While it might be ideal for all manner of social music-making activities, with prices starting at £1,619, it's hard to imagine many GTs being tossed into the back of trucks en route to beach barbecues and campfire singalongs.

From a guitar-design standpoint, the Taylor GT is a resounding success. The more time you spend with it, the more its charms reveal themselves, and for singer-songwriters, the GT's compact dimensions and intimate feel mean it's as ideally suited to the living room as it is to the stage or studio. It's a guitar that's very hard to put down and, for those who take the plunge, the GT is likely to become a constant companion. G

8/10 **An innovative and hugely enjoyable instrument with a serious price tag**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Sheeran by Lowden S02 **£879**
Cort Little CJ Walnut **£369**
Martin LX1E Little Martin **£499**

GRAND DESIGNS

Andy Powers explains the thinking behind the Taylor GT's scale length and new C-Class bracing pattern

"The string length is a foundational design choice. I wanted a scale length that's a little smaller. It's actually a really easy-to-understand scale length. A lot of players, myself included, will sometimes drop-tune E flat to E flat. The strings are a little slinkier. I like that feel when I play but I don't necessarily want it to play E flat to E flat. I want it at concert pitch.

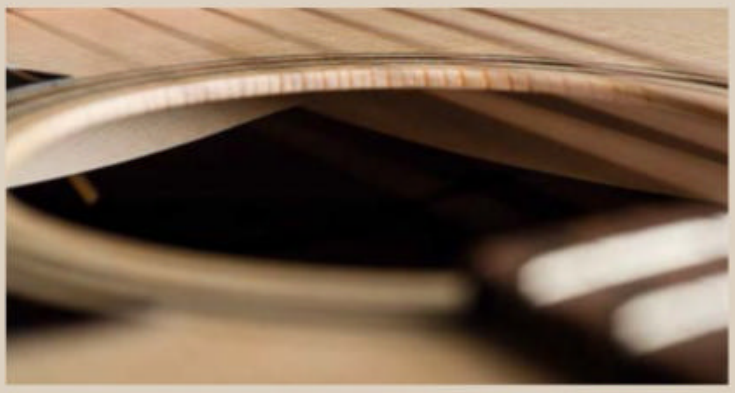
"So I took a more typical scale length – 25.5 inches – drop-tuned it and put a capo at the first fret. That's what this scale length is. It's not a travel-scale guitar but it's certainly a bit shorter than you're accustomed to. You have less string tension, so every note you play feels slinkier, and it actually feels like you've gauged down a set of strings but you still have the volume, power and punch out of a larger string. You don't have as much space between frets, so some of those complicated chords become easier to play."

BRACE FOR IMPACT

"I love the V-Class guitars. I love how that design works. You can think of this design as a variant of that. But really it's just borrowing some of the same concepts, the same foundational-level qualities that we build into the V-Class are applied here. Those physics are what they are. You have a need for stiffness parallel to the strings that contributes to a long sustaining note, you have a need for flexibility – that's what creates volume. In this case, the body is smaller, which means there's a unique challenge in getting the response uniform over the register.

"We needed a little bit of acoustic trickery so the whole thing would end up somewhat balanced. I needed a deliberately asymmetrical sonic response to make this body sound the way I wanted it to, so I wanted to build a deliberately asymmetrical bracing architecture that could deliver that.

"This is a different design based on a single cantilevered beam, if you want to talk about it in engineering terms. But the reality is – picture a diving board. I wanted to use that basic design to enhance the low-end response of this guitar, while still delivering the intonation aspects that I love about the V-Class design: the volume and the upper-register linear response. It's a different mechanism to exaggerate the low-end response of a relatively small guitar."



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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

With years on the road as a guitar tech and musician under his belt, Neil Ivison recently made the transition from high-end replica builds to original electric guitar design. Will The Hurricane blow our minds?

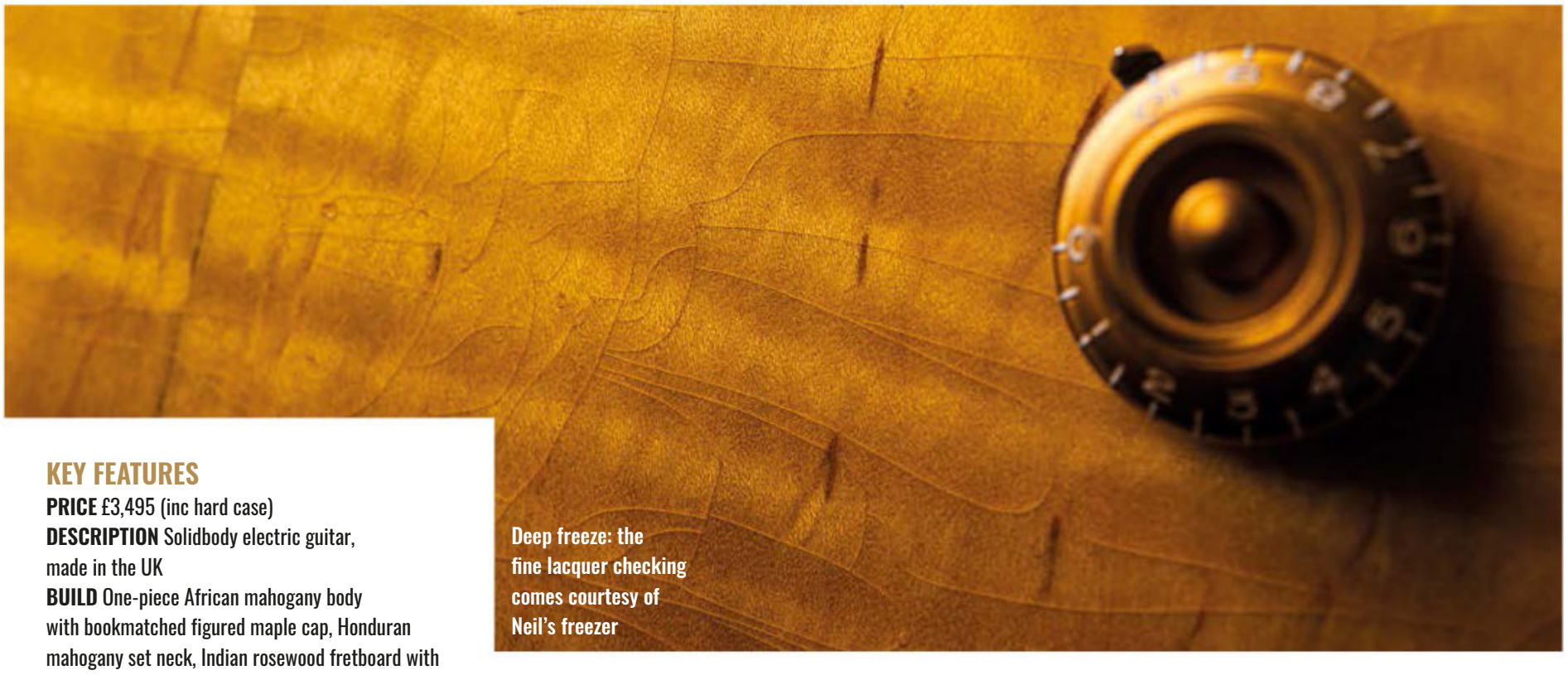
Neil Ivison first appeared our radar when we featured his 1956 Les Paul Special and 1965 Telecaster in our Vintage Bench Test feature in 2017. We were aware that he was a pro guitar tech but we were still struck by his instruments' superb playability. It was clear this guy really knew his stuff.

Motivated by the fear of his dream 1959 Les Paul Junior being lost, damaged or stolen while on the road, Neil decided to build himself a replica, and this soon blossomed into a guitar-building obsession.

"People started asking if I could build them one," he remembers, "and before long, I realised I could make a business out of this."

However, the "replica thing" never sat well with him. "I feel there's the potential to deceive and I never put 'Gibson' on my headstocks," says Neil. "Eventually I just decided to do something that encapsulates what I want, with a slab body and a faded sunburst."

Some may consider it heretical but it has been suggested that the great Les Paul Standards of the late 1950s might have sounded even better had they been equipped with wrapover tailpieces. Equally contentious is the notion that vintage Les Paul Specials are even more special with a PAF-style humbucking pickup in the bridge complementing the P-90 single-coil in the neck.



Deep freeze: the fine lacquer checking comes courtesy of Neil's freezer

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,495 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the UK
BUILD One-piece African mahogany body with bookmatched figured maple cap, Honduran mahogany set neck, Indian rosewood fretboard with 12" radius, 22 Jescar 45100 frets, bone nut
HARDWARE Faber compensated wrapover bridge, Faber vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS Sunbear P-90 (neck) and PAF-style (bridge) pickups, master volume and tone controls, three-way toggle pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.625"/625.5mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.2mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37.8mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.8kg/8.39lb
FINISH Aged nitrocellulose lacquer with faded aniline dye sunburst
LEFT HANDERS Yes
CONTACT ivisonguitars.com, atbguitars.com

What's in a name: though Ivison is a relatively new name on the scene, Neil's guitars have a classic quality

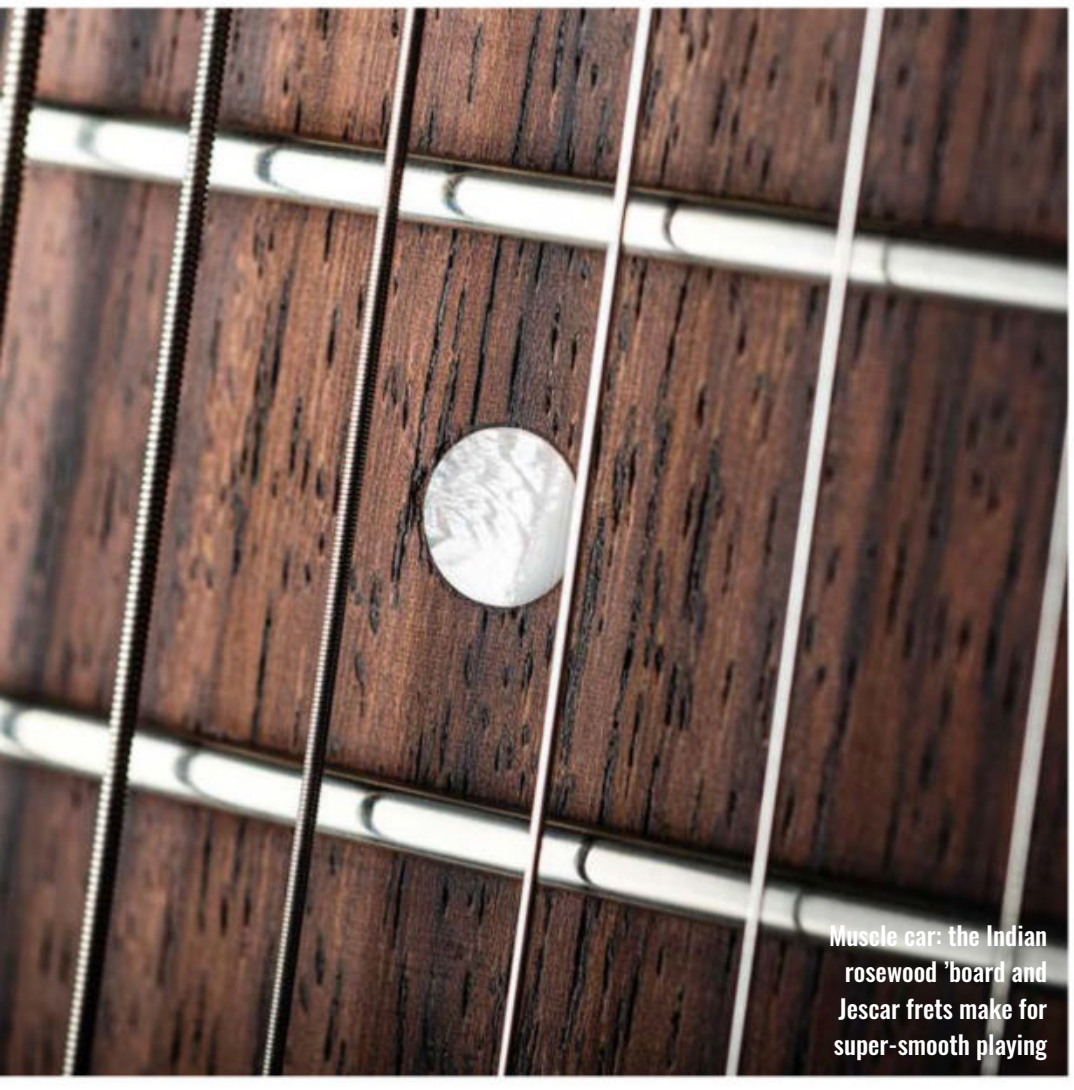
Both of these arguments have merit, and Neil's inspiration for The Hurricane was a mid-1950s Special retrofitted with a genuine PAF at the bridge that came in for repair. "Juniors and Specials with bridge humbuckers always annoyed me," he says. "But when I tried that one out, I thought, 'Hang about, maybe we've actually got something here.'"

Although The Hurricane's vibe owes plenty to Kalamazoo, its body and pickguard shapes resemble those of a Höfner Club. However, there's nothing even remotely Höfner-like about the Honduran mahogany neck profile, which is clearly inspired by 1950s Gibsons.

Carving fat neck profiles that fit comfortably in the hand without feeling unwieldy is a stern test for any guitar builder, and The Hurricane's neck certainly passes muster. All too often necks that are billed as being '50s-inspired end up as crude U-shapes but Neil has a rare understanding of shoulder subtleties and complex curves.

Though inspired by a Les Paul Special, The Hurricane has a bookmatched maple top carved into a gentle arch. The central section is mostly flat longitudinally but it rolls over abruptly to meet the single-ply binding in the area around the upper bout and cutaway. Behind the bridge and beyond the waist, the height decreases gently but the overall effect is more like a convex meniscus than a deep-dish archtop, and the shallow neck angle creates a playing angle more akin to a Les Paul Junior than a Standard.

The right to bear arms: The Hurricane has a Sunbear P-90 pickup in the neck position



Muscle car: the Indian rosewood 'board and Jescar frets make for super-smooth playing

Fat lot of good: the size of the Honduran mahogany neck belies its approachability

Most new guitar builders go for well-established pickup brands, if only for buyer confidence. Neil planned to do so too until he met Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups at a guitar show. Sunbears are now standard in Neil's builds and here we have expertly aged P-90 and PAF-style units. If you want something different, single-pickup options or any combination of the two are available.

The hardware comes from Faber in Germany and the wrapover bridge features compensated take-off points for each string. It's solid aluminium with no adjustable parts, and there are no issues with the intonation. The control layout is like a Les Paul Junior's, with the addition of a three-way switch. Under the hood there are vintage taper CTS pots and an Ivison branded paper-in-oil tone capacitor.

Neil uses nitrocellulose for the finish, with faded cherry for the body and a faded sunburst on top. It's a genuine fade too, with aniline red subjected to UV light for that gorgeous naturally aged look. The lacquer checking is natural too, thanks to a recently acquired freezer that occupies a corner of Neil's spray booth.

IN USE

With its ideal weight and extremely familiar neck profile, The Hurricane feels comfortable from the outset. It helps that the Indian rosewood fretboard is as smooth as the Jescar frets, the edges are gently rolled and the guitar feels precise but easy to play.

Bear witness: there's a PAF-style Sunbear pickup next to the compensated Faber wrapover bridge

Stay in control: the controls are like a Les Paul Junior's but with the addition of a three-way switch

Smooth operators: aged vintage-style Faber Deluxe tuners complete the look

The Hurricane certainly has an acoustic voice. Its string-to-string balance is even, chords are full-bodied and there's ample sustain with a very even decay. The harmonic content isn't quite as dense as our Les Paul Special but it's livelier than our Goldtop and it bridges the gap between them. Bass frequencies are deep but focused, the midrange has a full-bodied growl and there's brightness that stops short of the metallic ping that often comes with aluminium wraptails.

With guitars of this type, the pickups are the most important component, so we fire up our mid-1960s WEM Westminster. As PAF replicas go, Sunbear's are among the best, and the bridge unit successfully captures The Hurricane's sonic character. It's bright, clear, aggressive and very touch-sensitive. If you're a fan of cocked-wah midrange quack, harmonic bloom and the open-throated roar of vintage-style humbuckers, you'll find plenty to love here.

The P-90 is mellower, darker and sweeter, with a tonality that's more mid than late 1950s. Much like the Telecaster neck/bridge pickup dilemma, some players will enjoy the contrast, while others may find it a bit much. The shared tone control doesn't help but some pickup height adjustments improve the balance and the middle setting evens out to a lovely phasey chime.

If the idea of early 1950s Goldtop and late 1950s Burst tones in one compact and convenient package appeals, look no further. Granted, there are some minor detailing issues, but they're barely noticeable on account of the aged finish. As a player, this is a live one – and one of the most enjoyable guitars of its type that we've encountered in quite some time.

Neil Ivison's reputation as a guitar builder of note was established by his vintage replicas, but The Hurricane represents a successful transition into original guitar design. Like the most successful boutique luthiers, Neil has combined classic elements to create a look that is reassuringly familiar yet fresh and original. We can't wait to see what he does next.

9/10 **Outstanding tone, superb playability and classic looks make The Hurricane a serious contender**

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Gibson Custom 1959 Les Paul Standard **£5,199**
Collings 290 **£3,879**
B&G Goldfinger **£5,499**

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Electro-Harmonix Founder, Mike Matthews. (PHOTO: MIKIODO)

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JACKSON
PRO SERIES ROB CAGGIANO SIGNATURE SHADOWCASTER

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

The current Volbeat and former Anthrax guitarist's signature axe is an offset – but not as you know it

Rob Caggiano's current gig finds him blending metal and rockabilly influences with Danish rockers Volbeat. It's perhaps no surprise, then, that his Jackson signature guitar is a similarly eclectic mash-up. Jackson's long-discontinued Outcaster was a more metal-friendly close cousin of the retro-flavoured Charvel Surfcaster, and it's the Outcaster that provides the basis for this new Caggiano signature instrument.

With a body almost like a Jazzmaster or Jaguar reimagined in Dinky form, the Shadowcaster's pair of chrome-topped DiMarzio humbuckers, stop tailpiece and 12-16 inch compound fingerboard radius make it hard to envisage any surf music being performed with it any time soon. Its handsome Purple Metallic finish is a similar hue to that of Rob's previous ESP signature guitar, while the Shadowcaster's metal credentials are further emphasised by its plunging rear cutaway contours and a neck profile that seems to have been primed for maximum shred.

The neck has been carved very thin and the overall feel is reminiscent of 1980s and 1990s Superstrat models. While not exactly uncomfortable, it does lack the supporting shoulders found on more modern slim carves.

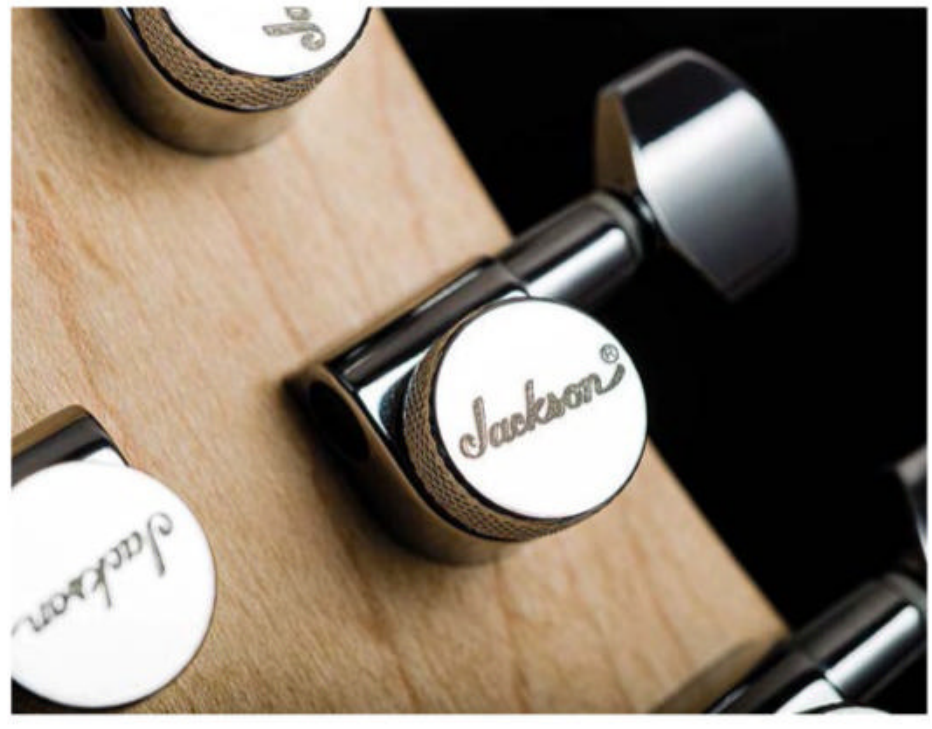
The five-way pickup selector is orientated horizontally underneath the bridge and is unusually configured so that the neck pickup is found in position one, and the bridge unit in position five. This may initially seem disconcerting but this is a signature model after all. If that's where Rob wants it, who are we to argue?

IN USE

The humble powerchord is a huge part of the Anthrax and Volbeat sound, and the custom DiMarzio Rob Caggiano Signature bridge humbucker has been designed accordingly, with a rich and punchy voicing to best showcase the devil's dyad. We often wax lyrical about the tonal benefits of an ebony 'board when it comes to playing down-tuned metal riffs and, when tuned to drop D, the Shadowcaster is no exception. Its combination of ebony and mahogany delivers a dynamic, cutting rock tone that bites and rasps every bit as much as the riffs we play on it. It's one of the best metal rhythm tones we've heard in a long time.

Airs and graces: the DiMarzio Air Norton neck pickup delivers percussive rhythm tones

Shadow warrior: the Shadowcaster's ebony fingerboard helps add definition to chunky riffs



KEY FEATURES

PRICE £919
DESCRIPTION 6-string electric solidbody, made in Indonesia
BUILD Mahogany body, bolt-on maple neck with 12-16" compound radius ebony fingerboard, 24 jumbo frets, black plastic nut
HARDWARE Jackson sealed die-cast locking tuners, tune-o-matic-style adjustable bridge with anchored tailpiece
ELECTRICS DiMarzio Rob Caggiano Signature (bridge), DiMarzio Air Norton DP193 (neck) humbucking pickups, 5-way blade pickup selector, volume and tone control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 52.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.9mm at 1st fret, 20.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52mm at bridge, 35.6mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.2kg/7lb
FINISHES Purple Metallic
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT jacksonguitars.com

In the neck position, the Air Norton is less rich and soupy than we were expecting, making it useful for percussive rhythm work. But it possesses enough power for rich lead tones too. Though we'd wager that the array of series and parallel inner and outer coil combinations on offer through positions two to four won't be explored too often by heavy rock players, they provide a versatile array of additional, lighter textures ideal for overdubs or cleaner passages.

Signature guitars are sometimes designed with concessions to the mass market but with the Shadowcaster, Jackson and Caggiano have remained true to the requirements of the artist whose name adorns its truss-rod cover. If you're a metal or modern heavy rock player, you may find that Caggiano's needs perfectly match your own.

8/10 **Superb metal tones from a distinctive and compact package that fans of slim necks will enjoy**

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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WALRUS AUDIO

JULIANNA DELUXE CHORUS/VIBRATO

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Oklahoma City's finest returns with a souped-up version of its popular demigoddess-inspired shimmer box

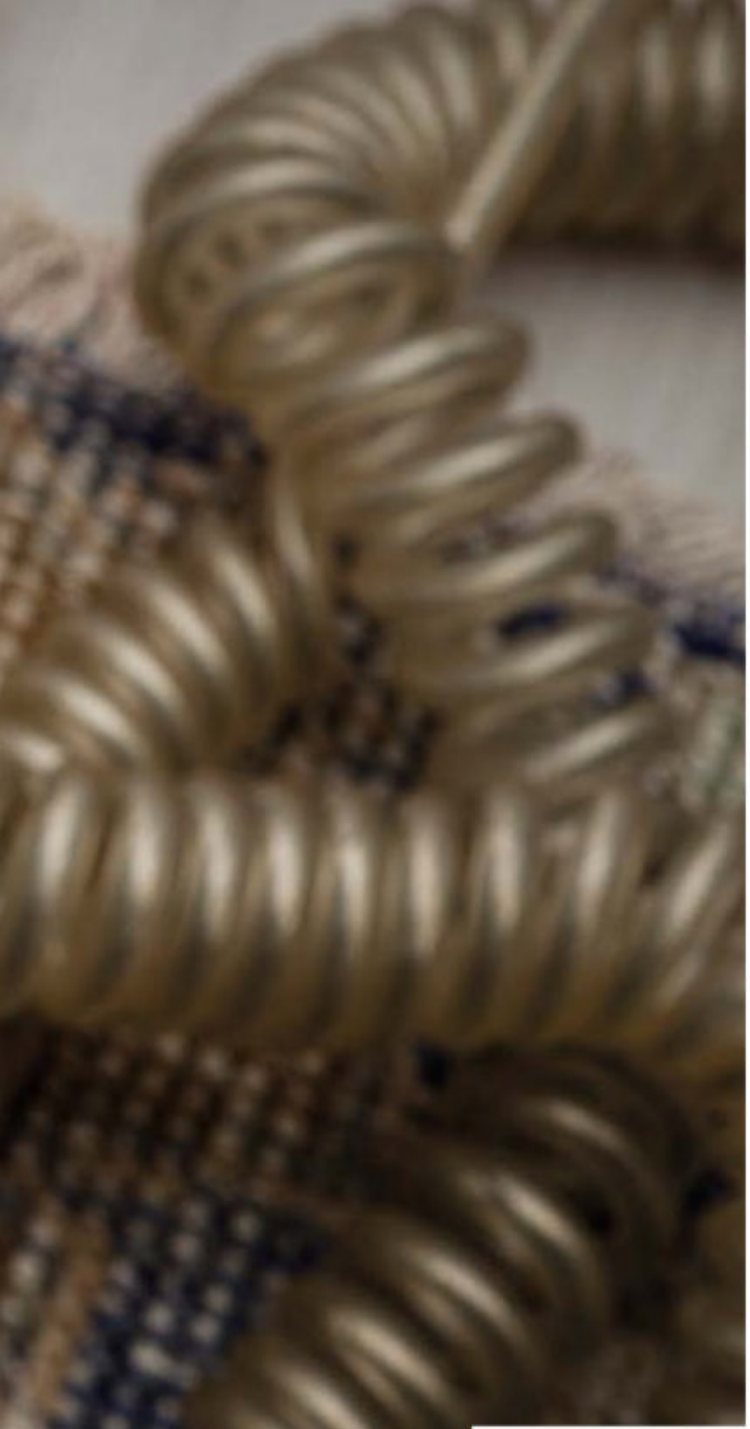
We were very impressed with Walrus Audio's beautiful Julia chorus/vibrato pedal. So much so, that it was difficult to imagine what more could possibly be crammed into the format. Unbeknown to us, around the time of the updated Julia model's release at the beginning of the year, Walrus Audio was already hard at work on the Julianna, which promises the player precious new textures, as well as added functionality. However, everything the Julia does, the Julianna can do too, so should you be tempted to upgrade, know that there's no danger of losing your favourite flavours.

The Julianna is an all-analogue chorus/vibrato with a digital LFO and comes with depth and rate knobs, as you'd expect. However, the depth knob hides a secondary function, Drift, which speeds up and slows down the rate of the LFO. Walrus describes it as, "Like having a little robot inside your pedal who can work the rate knob for you", and it's a concept only marginally less outré than the effect itself.

The doors of perception swing wide open with the Lag knob, which allows you to set the centre delay time that the LFO modulates around from a smooth, tight modulation to "noisy and nauseating" detune at maximum levels. Finally, D-C-V blends dry, chorus and vibrato, in that order. There's an enticingly smooth transition along the dial, making for genuinely beautiful blends.

The Julia comes with a toggle switch for Shape, which allows the player to modulate the pitch of their signal with sine or triangle waves, but the Julianna boasts an additional random-wave LFO option for increased wooziness should you feel inclined. Walrus assures us that this, together with the Drift control, can lead to some dizzying auditory highs. Time to text our mum to tell her we're going to be home late tonight.

Having decided to double down on pretty much every aspect of the original Julia design, Walrus has also equipped the Julianna with another mini-toggle that, in conjunction with the tap tempo foot switch, lets you select a quarter-note, quarter-note triplet or eighth-note multiplier to achieve The Edge-style rhythmic pulses. Finally, the Julianna bristles with mono/stereo ins and outs, as well as a tap/expression pedal input, all of which make it especially pedalboard friendly, despite its side-mounted jacks. These additions also mean the pedal is just as sonically dangerous in the hands of keyboard players as it is guitarists.



In good shape: everything the Julia does, the Julianna can do too – and more besides

KEY FEATURES

DESCRIPTION Chorus/vibrato pedal, hand-wired in the USA
CONTROLS Rate, Depth (Drift), Lag, D-C-V knobs, Div and Shape mini-toggles, tap footswitch
FEATURES Stereo ins and outs, tap tempo/expression pedal input, mains power only
DIMENSIONS 64 x 52 x 120mm
CONTACT face.be, walrusaudio.com

IN USE

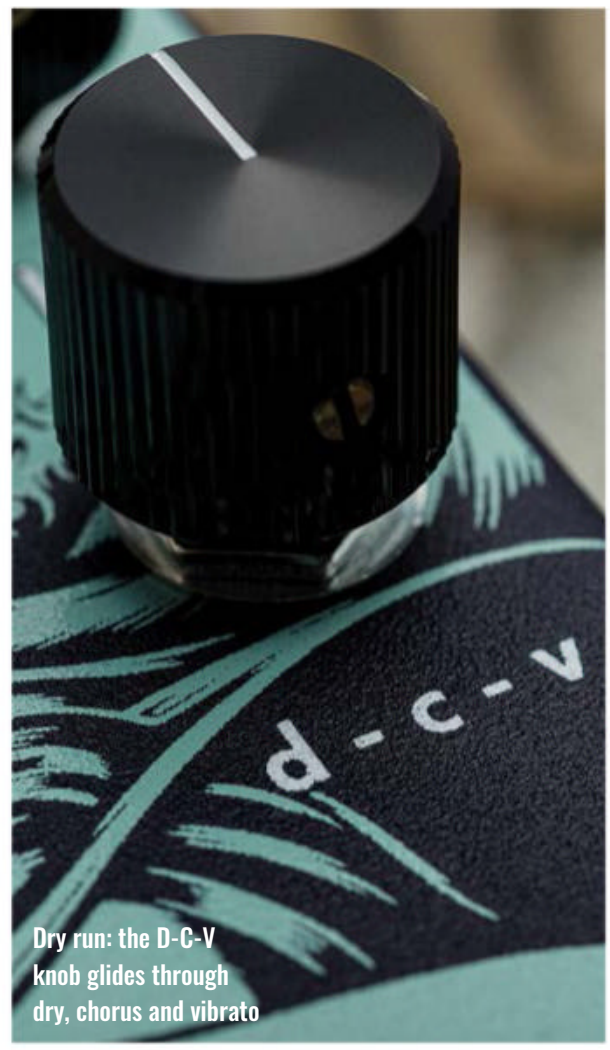
The Julianna cries out for stereo exploration, so we assemble a dual Vox set-up and stand at the apex of our tonal Golgotha with little but a Telecaster for protection. At low levels, the pedal brings a warm 3D shimmer to chord work that's reminiscent of vintage Roland units. As we crank the dials further and work the Drift, Shape and Lag settings, we swoon into psychonautic soundscapes held safely in Julianna's loving arms.

Emerging, blinking, from our stereo reverie some time later, we conclude this is one of the most engaging chorus/vibrato units we've encountered for a long time. Well played, Walrus. Well played.

10/10 **A powerful source of sublime textures from a boutique powerhouse – strongly recommended**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

ThorpyFX The Deep Oggin **£249**
Chase Bliss Warped Vinyl MkII **£349**
Mad Professor Double Moon **£199**



Dry run: the D-C-V knob glides through dry, chorus and vibrato

Tap dance: select note multipliers for edgy rhythmic pulses

WARM AUDIO
JET PHASER

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The second Warm Audio remake of an uncompromising 1970s pedal features phase, fuzz – and 2.1kg of chunky retro goodness

We were quite taken with the Foxy Tone Box, Warm Audio's fluffy yet ferocious revival of the old Foxx Tone Machine. But if you thought that was bold and quirky, cop a load of the company's take on this other 1970s classic, the Roland AP-7 Jet Phaser.

A pedal that's almost as big and heavy as a small pedalboard, with a steel shell and chunky wooden end pieces, the Warm Audio Jet Phaser promises to replicate the Roland unit's unique combination of deeply swirly modulation and hot, searing fuzz.

Once again, authenticity takes priority over concessions to modern convenience. The designers could've surely squeezed their 'faithful recreation' of the original circuit into a smaller enclosure but we're glad they didn't. There is at least one modernising touch though: an 18-volt adapter input as an alternative to running via two PP3 batteries.

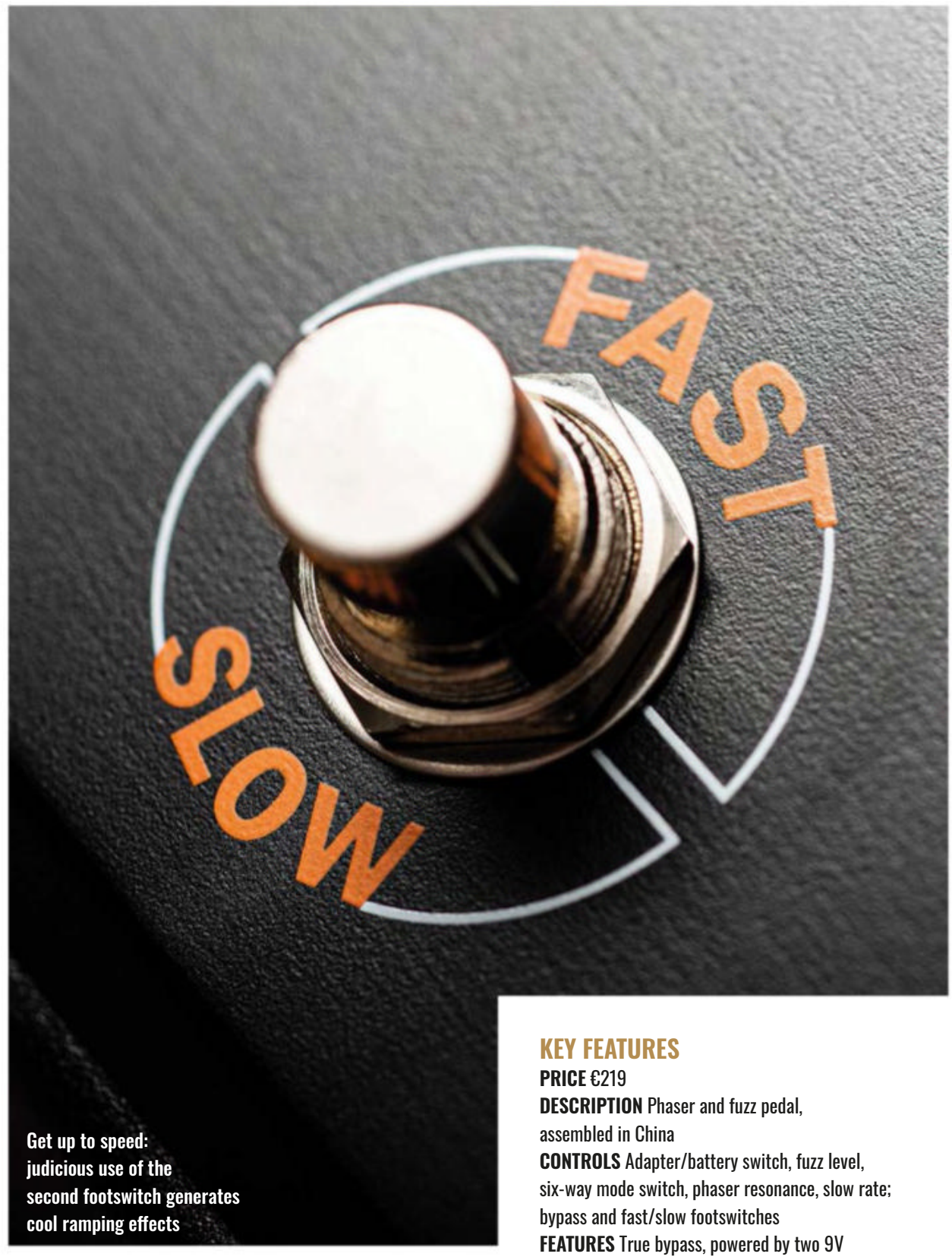
There's a switch for manually selecting mains or battery power but otherwise the controls remain true to the original: fuzz output level, phaser resonance, slow phaser rate and, most importantly, a six-way mode dial. Jet modes one to four offer bright or dark fuzz with light or heavy phasing, while the other two keep the modulation clean (there's no option for fuzz without phase). That second footswitch lets you ramp the phaser speed up and down, Leslie-style, between your selected slow rate and a fixed 'fast' setting.

IN USE

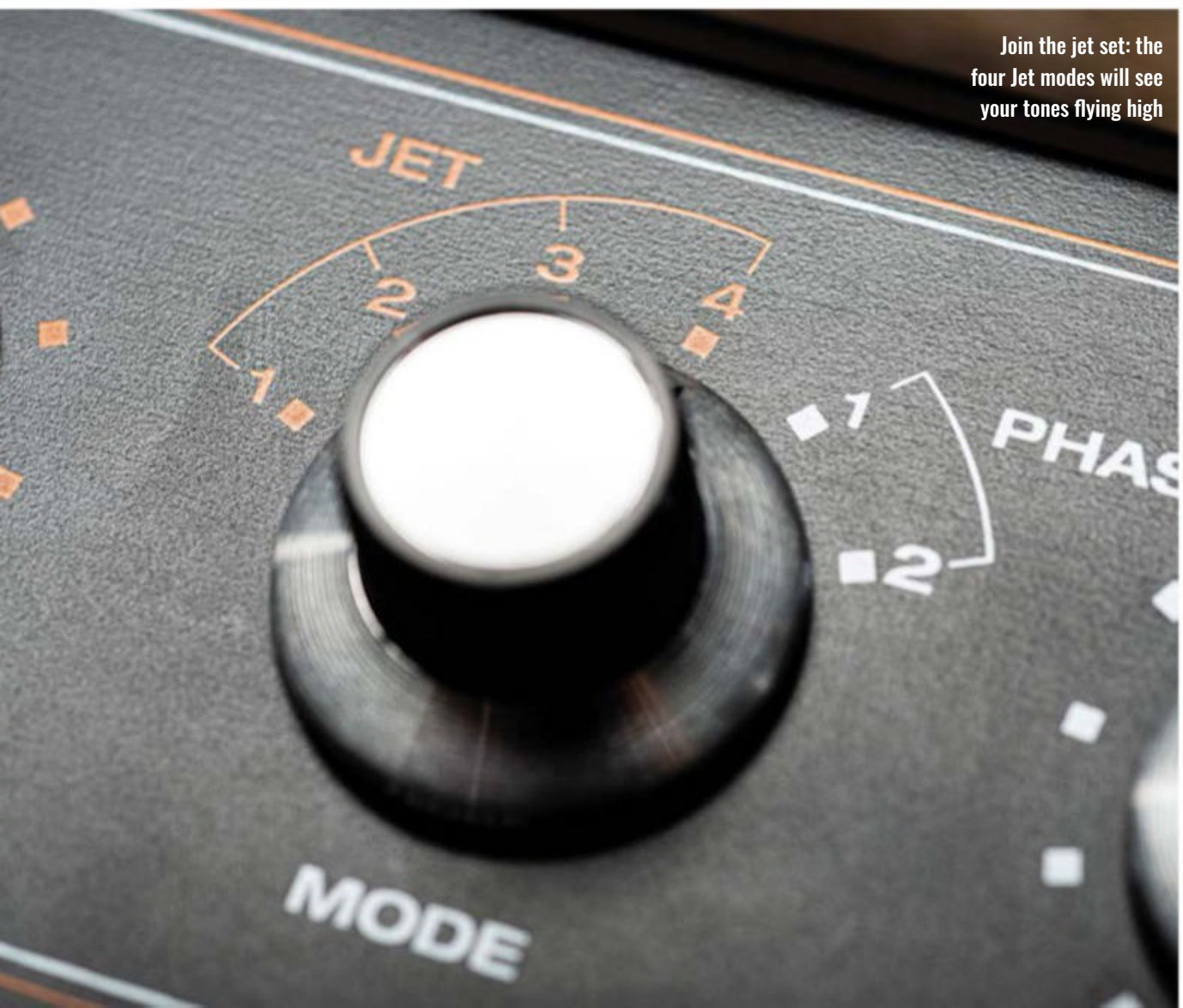
To begin, we plunge recklessly into Jet mode two – for the zingiest fuzz and the deepest phase – with resonance maxed out and speed at its slowest. As expected, it's intense: the phasing effect arcs around in a demonically creeping swirl, with a ripping texture that really is reminiscent of being too close to a jet engine.

Mode one calms down the modulation with no loss of fuzzy fire. It's fantastic fun and quite inspiring for lead playing, and that's despite a dramatic scooping out of the lower frequencies through most of the phaser's range. Modes three and four fix that but at the expense of all that blistering treble. There's a reason most distortion pedals have tone controls…

The clean phaser modes sound a little tame after all that but they do their own less-spectacular job with a degree of finesse – and the speed switch does allow for some fascinating ramping effects that recall stompbox rotary speaker simulators such as the Neo Micro Vents.



Get up to speed: judicious use of the second footswitch generates cool ramping effects



Join the jet set: the four Jet modes will see your tones flying high

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €219
DESCRIPTION Phaser and fuzz pedal, assembled in China
CONTROLS Adapter/battery switch, fuzz level, six-way mode switch, phaser resonance, slow rate; bypass and fast/slow footswitches
FEATURES True bypass, powered by two 9V batteries (included) or 18V mains supply
DIMENSIONS 262 x 168 x 63mm
CONTACT warmaudio.com

There are some minor issues here: the Jet level is supposed to be capable of adding a significant boost but ours barely matches the bypass signal when set to full; and the sound with mains power is slightly thinner than with batteries. Early-production gremlins?

It's hardly important anyway. We called Warm Audio's Foxy Tone Box "joyously impractical" and that's arguably even more true here. The Jet Phaser is a daft piece of kit in some ways but in sonic terms it's an absolute riot – and for some of us, that's all that matters.

8/10 **A fearsome floor-monster that has the massive tones to match its footprint**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Heptode Virtuoso **€199**
KMA Astrospurt **€199**
Mu-Tron Phasor III **$279**

LATERAL PHONICS

MARRAKESH PREAMP CONSOLE & DEADMAN FUZZ

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

We dig into desolate torn-speaker fuzz and 1970s-style studio preamp tones straight outta Moscow

Lateral Phonics comprises a pair of annoyingly young Muscovite pedal makers who look set to put Russia on the boutique effects map. Embracing the popular hand-painted design language of established US and European effects brands such as Z.Vex, Fuzzrocious and JAM, Lateral Phonics augments its wild custom paintwork with weird mismatched knobs, abundant scratches and holes drilled seemingly at random. It's a bold aesthetic.

The Deadman Fuzz is an updated take on the classic Triangle Big Muff and features a silicon-germanium hybrid schematic, as well as NOS parts. That out-there artwork? At no point does it offer any practical indication of the control settings or indeed which knob does what, and the instruction manuals are no more than black and white postcards. Depending on the user's outlook, this minimalist approach to information sharing could actively encourage deeper experimentation. Then again, it could completely frustrate creativity.

Happily, the control array here is uncomplicated and features chickenhead knobs for volume and low cut, while the fuzz control is distinguished by a silver-top witch's hat, the numbers on which are the closest you'll get to an indication of setting. Three holes have been drilled into the top of the enclosure for cosmetic reasons, although a hole-free version of the pedal is available too.

Arguably, no boutique pedal brand's catalogue is complete without at least one all-in-one box. Depending on its place in your chain, the Marrakesh Preamp Drive can play a wide number of roles, from EQ, booster, buffer and preamp to saturator, overdrive and even console-style fuzz.

The Marrakesh features a four-knob control panel, the most important of which is the threshold knob in the centre, twice the size of its bass, treble and volume siblings. The lower the value of this girthy knob, the more punchy and eventually distorted your sound becomes. There's also a side-mounted headroom switch that offers a low nine-volt setting for increased harmonic distortion and a high 24-volt setting for more 'air', dynamic range and volume.

Lateral Phonics clearly took inspiration from vintage studio kit when it came to creating the Marrakesh circuit. The squat

Picture perfect: Lateral Phonics' pedals offer little visual indication as to their functionality, but the input jack is obvious enough

Around the world: the Marrakesh brings studio preamp tones to your pedalboard

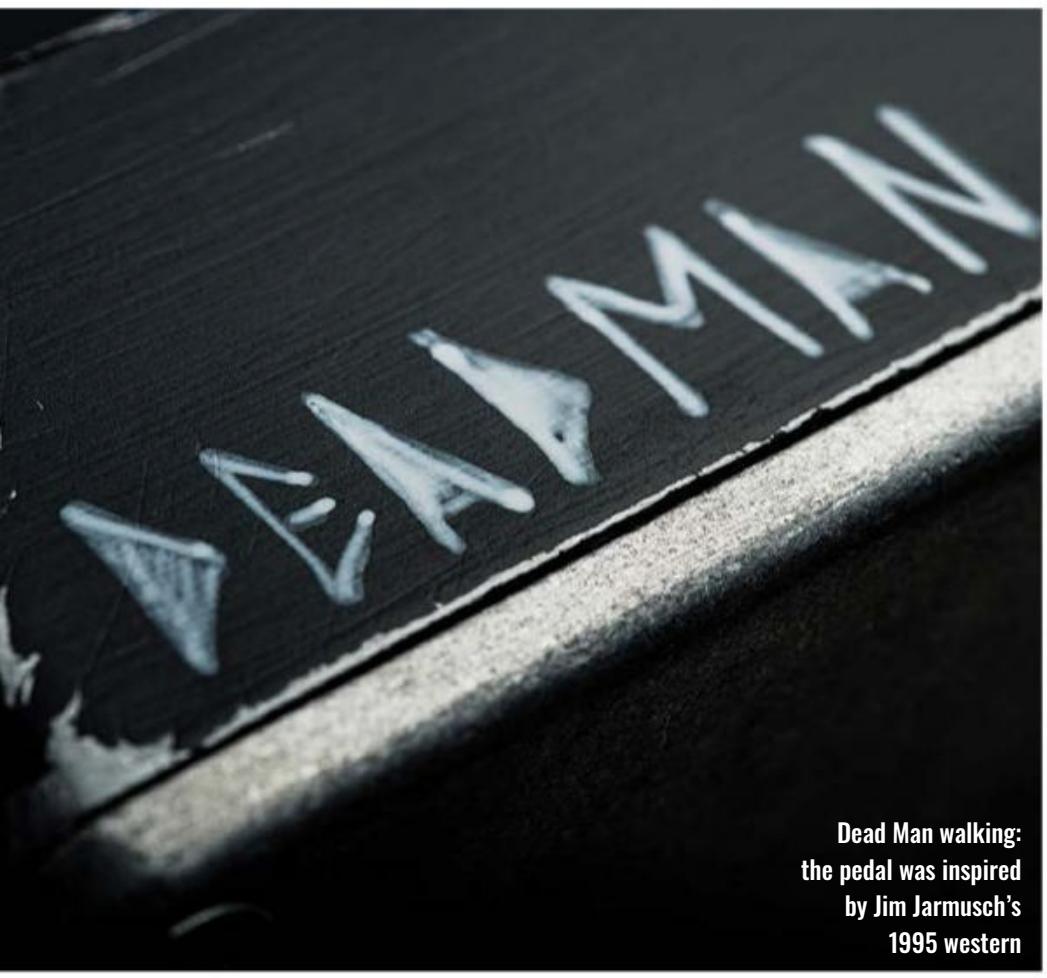
unit is built around DOA-990 discrete operational amplifiers, a powerful, low-noise op-amp design. It was developed by sonic overlord Dean Jensen in the 1970s and released for public use in the February 1980 issue of the *AES Journal* before its subsequent induction into the NAMM Hall of Fame in 2018. But you knew all that already, of course.

IN USE

We begin our listening session with the Marrakesh running between a Gretsch White Falcon and a Cornford Hurricane before going on to experimenting with a basic pedalboard both before and after the preamp in the signal chain.

In the first instance, we press the pedal into service as a clean boost/EQ. Here, the Marrakesh works well, adding sheen and detail where needed and pushing the amp nicely. The headroom switch works as advertised, with a noticeably more open feel in the 24-volt setting compared to the hairier grunt of the nine-volt option.

Play dead: the Deadman's enclosure comes with or without holes



Dead Man walking: the pedal was inspired by Jim Jarmusch's 1995 western

Get amped: we suspect that the lead from your amplifier goes in here

Dizzy heights: the Marrakesh features both low and high voltage settings

The EQ section is certainly capable, with 15dB of cut or boost in both bass and treble directions. The overall character is warm and organic, with the vibe of a vintage studio desk. There are some high-quality, silky textures to be found here but ramping the threshold hard left gives us something more unusual, a chewy *Revolution*-style fuzz. It's unruly and aggressive, and an entertaining departure from the more genteel clean boost voice.

With the Marrakesh at the other end of our chain, it's a capable pre-boost/buffer, and adds personality to our pedals. The EQ is flexible but without careful gain staging it can also bump up the noise floor. All in all, it's an engaging take on the floor-mounted all-in-one theme.

The road to hell is paved with misguided Big Muff schematics. But Lateral Phonics has built its Deadman Fuzz with a commendable 'carpe scrotum' attitude, avoiding many of the original pedal's foibles thanks to hybrid germanium-silicon innards. While not an entirely new approach, it's done well here, and makes for an extremely impressive fuzz that's thrillingly gnarly while punchy enough to get through a mix intact.

At low-gain settings the Deadman is a beautiful rhythm pedal that, unusually for the breed, occasionally allows minor or major thirds to be audible in the mix along with your artful powerchords. The low-cut control allows for tone-shaping without getting extreme and there's enough volume available to slap a tube amp into submission.

Poking the bear further unleashes a wall of saw-toothed gain ideal for searing lead work, especially expressive bends and wide vibrato. It also chokes out and stutters nicely when you starve it with the volume knob.

When it comes to hand-painted, NOS-component-equipped boutique pedals, it's fair to say that there's a lot of them on the market. In order to successfully establish a brand in this already crowded sphere, it takes more than fridge-front visuals and a large Instagram following. But Lateral Phonics shows real potential here, and the Deadman Fuzz is more than able to stand up alongside some of the best fuzz pedals we've heard. We expect to hear more from this Russian duo in the future.

KEY FEATURES

DEADMAN FUZZ
PRICE €195
DESCRIPTION Handwired silicon-germanium fuzz pedal, made in Russia
CONTROLS Volume, fuzz, low cut
FEATURES Side-mounted in and out jacks, on/off LED, true bypass switching, 9V mains power
DIMENSIONS 119.5 x 94 x 51mm
CONTACT lateralphonics.com

9/10 **More than just another Muff clone, the Deadman could be a future classic**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fuzzrocious Blast Furnace **£159**
Keeley Fuzz Bender **£149**
EHX Big Muff Op-Amp **£69**

KEY FEATURES

MARRAKESH PREAMP CONSOLE
PRICE €245
DESCRIPTION Hand-wired preamp pedal, made in Russia
CONTROLS Threshold, bass, treble, volume knobs, switchable high 24V and low 9V voicing
FEATURES Side-mounted in and out jacks, on/off LED, True Bypass, mains power only
DIMENSIONS 118 x 94 x 64mm

8/10 **A versatile pedal that offers quality textures in a wide variety of contexts**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley Tone Workstation **£299**
JHS Pedals Colour Box V2 **£439**
Chase Bliss Automatone Preamp MkII **£749**

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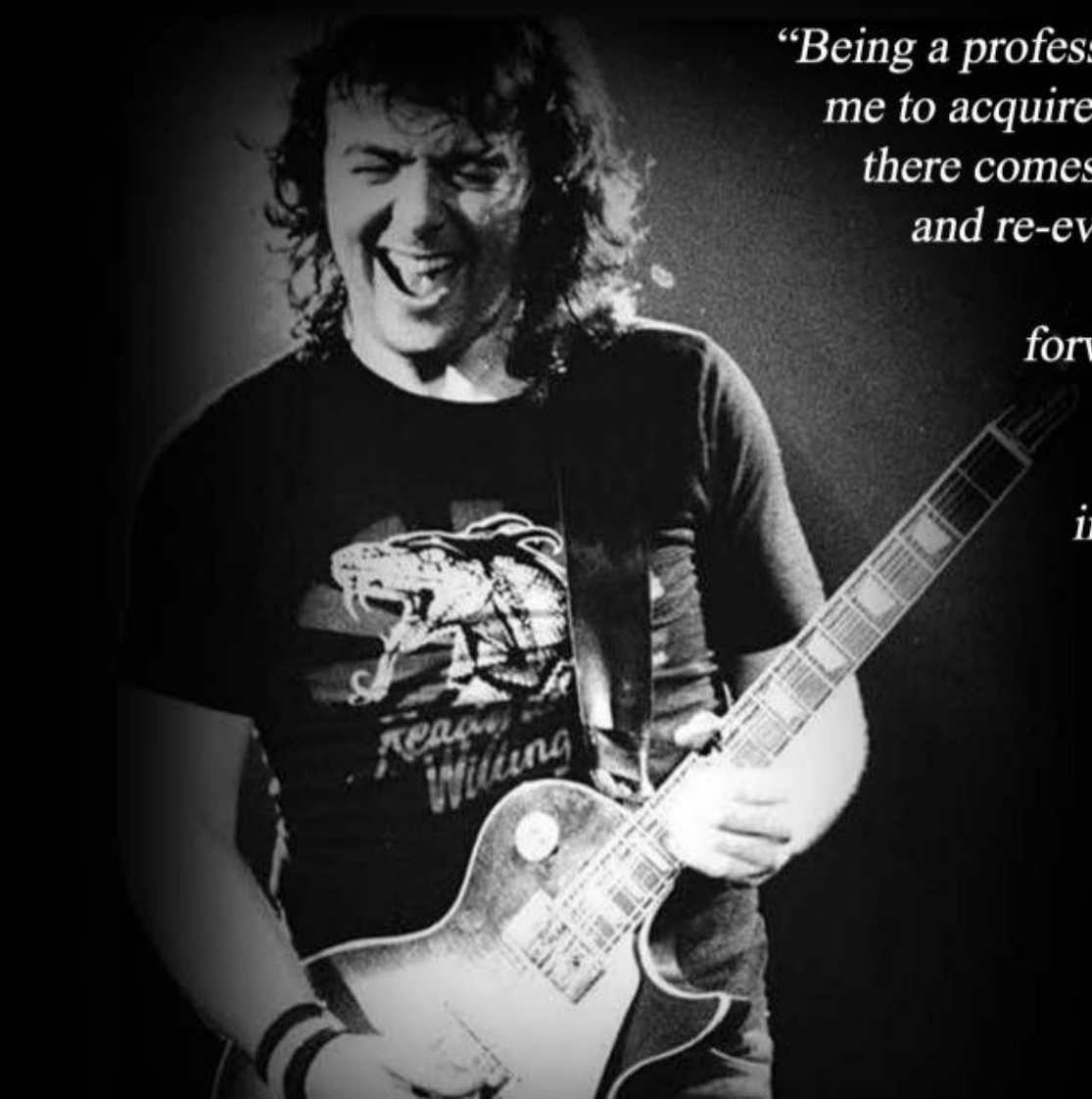

"Being a professional musician for over 50 years now has led me to acquire all kinds of music gear and memorabilia. But, there comes a time in life when you need to properly assess and re-evaluate those items.....

.....Everything here has to go, and I look forward to knowing that the items are once again being enjoyed by whoever wants them!

I will be donating a percentage of the auction income to two charities I admire, The Trussell Trust and Crisis"

Bernie Marsden

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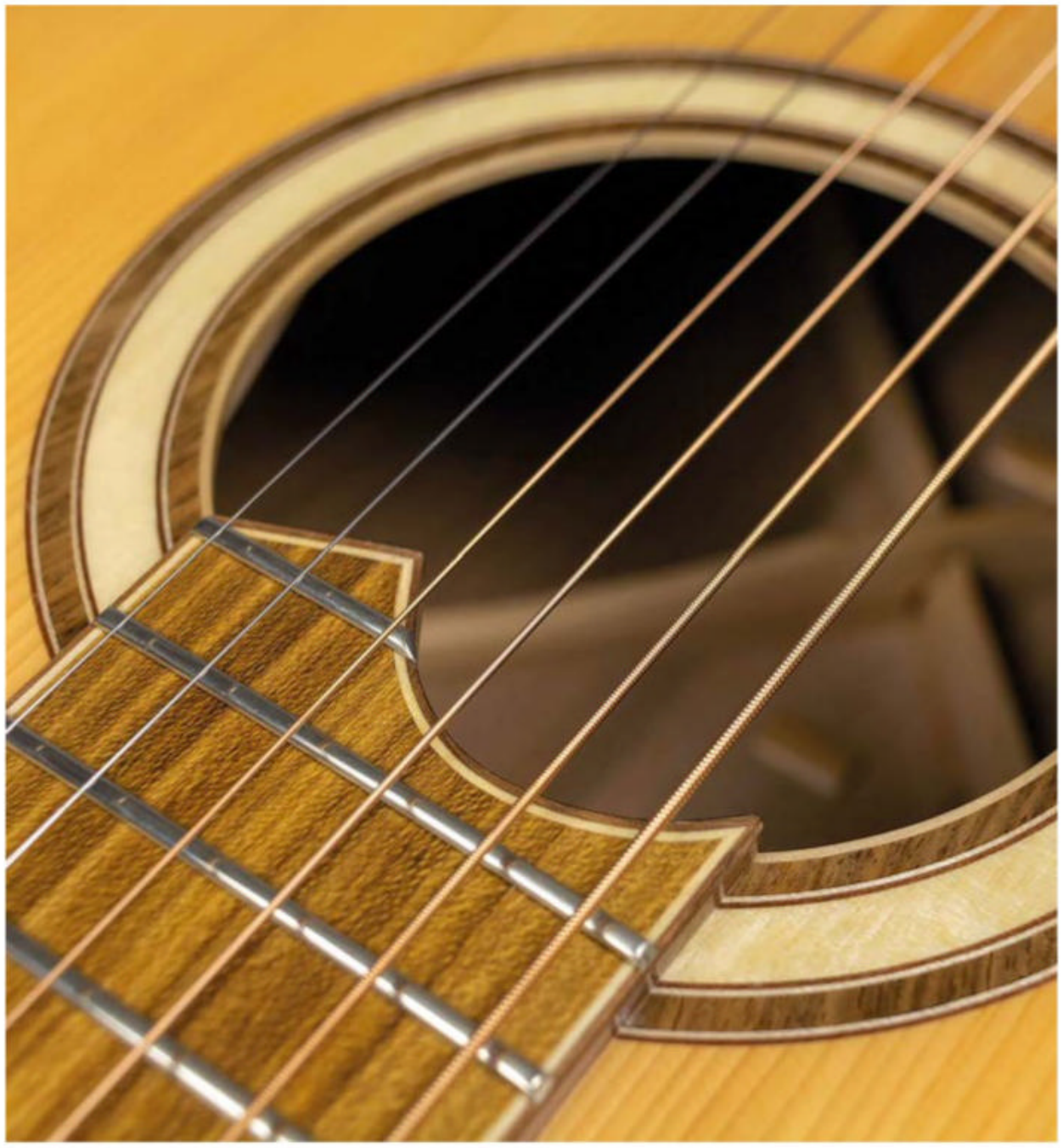


INDUSTRY INSIDER

TURNSTONE GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Rosie Heydenrych left behind a career in the charity sector to set up her small workshop in Surrey, specialising in English-grown timber and building a customer base that includes Tom Quayle and Martin Simpson

How did you get into guitar?

"My sister played the guitar as her school instrument. I actually chose the saxophone. I really struggled with the physical exertion required for the instrument. One evening, I was watching the TV and saw someone relaxing on their porch, playing the acoustic guitar. It looked so calming compared to the sax. From that moment on, I started taking my sister's classical guitar (much to her dismay). I bought a teach-yourself book and began playing every day. I didn't feel like I could ask my parents for proper lessons after the initial investment in all things saxophone."

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"At the age of 25, I was having a little bit of a quarter-life crisis. I was working in the charity sector in London, thinking that although I enjoyed my work, it wasn't something that I wanted to do forever. Music had been my active passion during university: playing in my first band, starting to write and perform songs, promoting bands in my free time, and hosting a show on the student radio station. My heart just told me I needed to be involved in music in some way – but how? It just so happened that an evening course in guitar making was advertised at the London Metropolitan University, which was just down the road from my day job. If anything, I thought it might be a nice thing to do to feed my creativity while working. Not long after starting it, I knew it was going to become so much more than that."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"During the four years of training, I would spend hours dreaming and thinking about my future business. I bought a business plan guidance book and wrote a full plan before I had even finished my very first guitar. As much as I was able to, I researched my market, my business offer, who my audience might be and how I might find some way or something unique to help me stand out from the crowd. Without jumping straight in, this gave me a good foresight into how the business was going to work, what my market position would be and how I would go about selling the guitars."

Did you have any external investment or support?

"Learning to master a craft and deliver it within the context of a business you intend make a living from takes quite a serious amount of time. I felt that, in my position, to seek any type of loan or pay-back investment at the beginning of my career, with me not really knowing when I would be able to begin paying it back, was not a particularly smart idea. I grew slowly but surely, investing my acquired income from both my part-time job and Turnstone commissions into the business. Through my membership with the MIA [the Music Industries Association], I explored grants available and have been generously supported and guided by the UK Department of International Trade when it comes to exhibiting and selling abroad. Their support has helped a great deal in attending international events and understanding the export market."

Rosie is currently tooled up and working on a custom guitar for Martin Simpson

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"I drew out my first Turnstone logo on a scrap of paper while working in my office job. I took a picture of it on my phone so I wouldn't lose it. I was certainly nowhere near nailing it at that stage but the idea to incorporate the image of the turnstone bird and the letter T into the logo had been buzzing around in my head for a while. It just suddenly came out onto that scrap of paper – and it's the same fundamental design that we use today. My husband and I turned it into a digital logo and then we ran it past a designer who smartened it up. I felt pretty strongly from the outset that this was the logo and the general feel that I wanted. But there was still work to do as far as branding, house colours, and style was concerned. I feel like it all started to fall into place when we began to get some kind of consistency on the website and on promotional materials. But I feel that it's always a work in progress. Things change and I need to remain flexible in order to adapt to changing times. If I ever think I've nailed it, that would suggest that I've found the final solution – and I don't want to commit myself to that."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"As we make custom guitars and some stock builds, nothing is ever really exactly the same specification. The first model that I launched was a grand auditorium-sized guitar called the TG model, which is probably the most popular size that my customers choose, but the other models are really gaining in popularity now too. One particular aspect of my building that people are becoming very interested in is my use of English-grown timber. From the outset, when I was learning, I was especially concerned about the overuse of endangered timbers in guitar making and wanted to make a concerted effort to trial alternative woods. Being English, it made sense that I explored the woods available on my doorstep. I started by sourcing an English walnut back and then swiftly became so obsessed by the concept of English wood that I made it my primary goal to build a whole guitar entirely out of English wood. This led to what is now known as my E-Series specification guitar."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"One of my proudest early moments, when the business first started, was getting a letter through the post that was addressed to Turnstone Guitar Company. I love seeing the instruments being played for the first time by customers, and being there when they initially open the case to see their new guitar. It's the music, at the end of the day. That's why I got into this. When customers write to me and say that their instruments are bringing them creative joy and musical inspiration, that's ultimately the thing I am most proud of – that I was involved in that."

What are the biggest opportunities for the guitar industry in 2021?

"Because we're a relatively small enterprise, we are nimble and flexible enough to adapt and move quite quickly on things. During lockdown, artists have sadly not been able to get out on the road and do gigs. But they have certainly been doing a lot of acoustic livestream sessions via their social media. I think this is a great thing for the acoustic guitar industry. There are new opportunities to be explored here."

What's next for Turnstone Guitars?

"I have spent most of this year investing in my workshop, building a spray booth and facilities to help me build with greater efficiency. The fruits of that labour are now to come, and I'm excited to get going and see where the next stage leads us. Right now, I'm actually building a custom guitar for folk artist Martin Simpson, which is also quite exciting. Artist engagement is something that we're excited to incorporate more into our future as well, so watch this space!"

Find out more at turnstoneguitar.co.uk

SHOP TALK

BRIAN WAMPLER
WAMPLER PEDALS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

Having made the transition from garage workbench to custom manufacturing some time ago, today Brian Wampler has artists lining up to declare their allegiance, helping his effects become mainstays of the modern market

Effects pedal designers tend to come to their craft via one of two routes: through formal education, technical training and a slog up the industry ladder; or by pursuing a passionate hobby, poking around where their probe possibly didn't belong, and learning through the process of repairing and modifying their own gear.

Brian Wampler came via the latter path. But you wouldn't know it given the heights to which he has ascended or the often breathtaking complexity and technicality of much of his company's current work. But even though the man's progress has gone from a love of dirt pedals to high-tech digital wonders, to software plug-in emulations of his own effects, he's somehow remained grounded by a passion for a simple and effective overdrive.

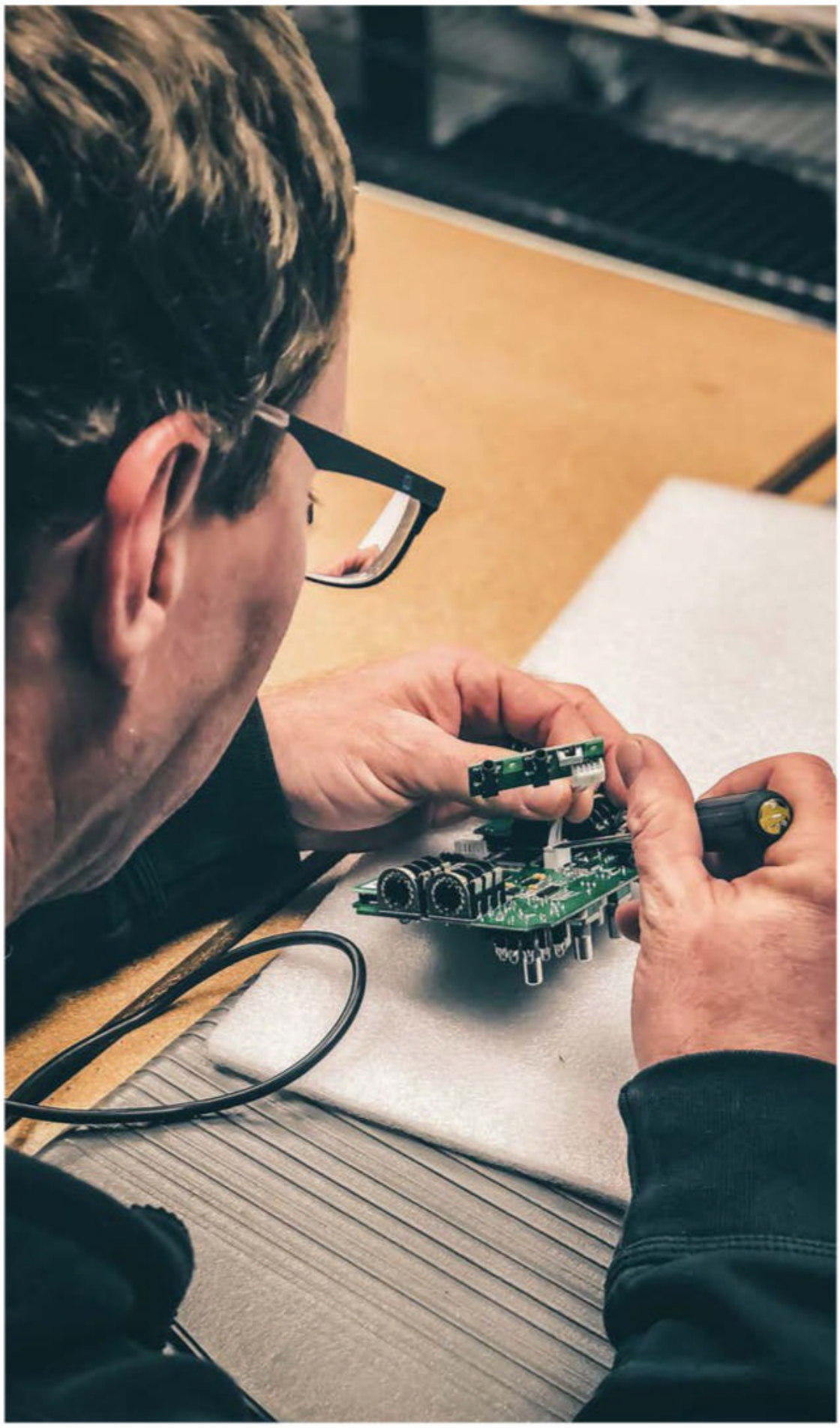
Having started playing the guitar at the age of seven, the concept of modifying and then fully redesigning a classic pedal first came to him around the year 2000, when a then more technically savvy pal made some improvements to Wampler's own Boss DS-1.

"I was amazed at how much the sound quality improved," says Wampler. "So I opened it up to see what he had changed and this one event triggered a streak of testing pedals, making changes to them and recording the results. I spent hours in my garage learning as much as I could about electronics and breadboarding, designing new ideas. I was hooked."

BYPASSING BOUTIQUE

Guitar journalists toss around the B-word as a stand-in for anything made in smaller batches, at a high level of quality or to an elevated design ethos. As such, the term can be used as a misguided catch-all. Despite ticking two of those three boxes, Brian doesn't feel he truly fits the bill anymore.

"In 2000 to 2005, what we'd call a 'boutique pedal' was different," says Wampler. "Back then, companies like Fulltone and Keeley were still kind of considered boutique. But I would say, as of recent years, Fulltone wouldn't really be considered 'boutique'. Nor would companies like us, JHS and EarthQuaker Devices, which are probably some of my closest competitors.



ABOVE Brian has always enjoyed getting hands-on and creating effects, though Wampler's manufacturing is now done in Los Angeles by Boutique Amps Distribution

Today, I think people look at us as 'high end' rather than 'boutique', because, like some of the other makers that used to be smaller, we have since become pretty big.

"Now we're seeing trends, smaller companies such as Reeves Electro Guitar Pedals. The guy makes pretty simple circuit designs such as Fuzz Faces and boosters but he does it with such an artistic style that it's amazing. He does part-to-part soldering with no circuit boards and stuff, and when you look inside, it's wonderful – it's like a work of art. To me, that's kind of the new boutique.

"It's impossible to scale that up and sell 5,000 pedals a month but I think there's still a big market demand for that, and guitarists are not slowing down in their desire to buy a particular something to get a certain tone that they have in mind. But, as with every industry, it seems like every year things morph and change into something different."

TECHCRUNCH DISRUPT

Early Wampler successes tended towards well-loved classics. Standards such as the Pinnacle overdrive, the Paisley Drive, and the Nirvana Chorus took a rather self-explanatory path toward rewarding guitarists' ongoing search for new and better flavours of effects that were already popular. Gradually though, Brian's designs became more and more complex, as he aimed to offer a more varied and versatile palette of sounds. Many standard-issue pedals were joined by Deluxe versions, which usually added a second footswitchable function and a handful of extra knobs, something he'd already explored with the Brent Mason Hotwired dual overdrive.

As such, pedals such as the Fuzztration, the Plexidrive Deluxe and the Tom Quayle Dual Fusion have upped the feature quotient considerably. But the real exponential explosion came with Brian's deeper dive into modern technology.

"I wanted to increase what we were doing from an engineering capacity," he says. "While I still love dirt pedals and they're still my favourite thing to make from a personal perspective, I think the way forward for us as a company is to get into some higher-level engineering but without sacrificing the quality."

While previous Wampler digital wonders such as the Faux Tape Echo V2, the Faux Spring Reverb and the Ethereal Reverb and Delay have hinted at this direction, the envelope was well and truly pushed by the recent and breathtaking Terraform pedal.

"We really spread our wings with that one," says Wampler. "Think of it as a Strymon Mobius [multi-dimensional modulation] type of effect: it has a selector so you can go through 11 different effects, stereo ins and outs, and lots of bells and whistles. But I'm still trying to keep it in our style, so I don't want menus. I want to make it in such a way that a person can not read a manual and still use it.

ABOVE Later Wampler pedals, such as the Pantheon, Fuzztration and Mini Faux Spring Reverb, built on the standards set by its classic early units to deliver more flavour and functionality

LEFT Released in 2010, the Paisley Drive, built for Brad Paisley, became a foundational pedal for Brian's company. The Deluxe version (pictured) followed in 2017

"During the [coronavirus] shutdown, we released some plug-ins too, and we're getting a huge demand for them so we might do more along those lines, as well as pedals. We'll see. But I am definitely fascinated by the digital side of technology and how all that relates to guitars."

As such, Wampler's own efforts seem to accurately mirror the progress of digital effects technology, from its arrival in the early 1980s to its status today. From "Wow, look what this thing can do" to "Eh, digital sounds kind of cold" to "Wow, look what this thing can do – and it sounds great", this tech has come full circle, while finally having put paid to the detracting characteristics that dogged many earlier examples of digital guitar-audio products.

"A lot of the sound-quality issues came because getting good converters for your analogue-to-digital was expensive," says Wampler. "Not many people wanted to buy a pedal for the price of a small computer. But that's changed. Now, you can get pretty powerful chips that are relatively inexpensive and have great-quality converters.

"It's pretty exciting. Even designing effects in a digital environment is very different to how it was 10 years ago. It used to involve a lot of hand-coding – not that it doesn't now – but there are people making platforms that allow for WYSIWYG interfaces, where you can drag and drop stuff, put a circuit board to it and it uploads that effect to your circuit board. It's an exciting time to be designing effects."

BAD TO THE BONE

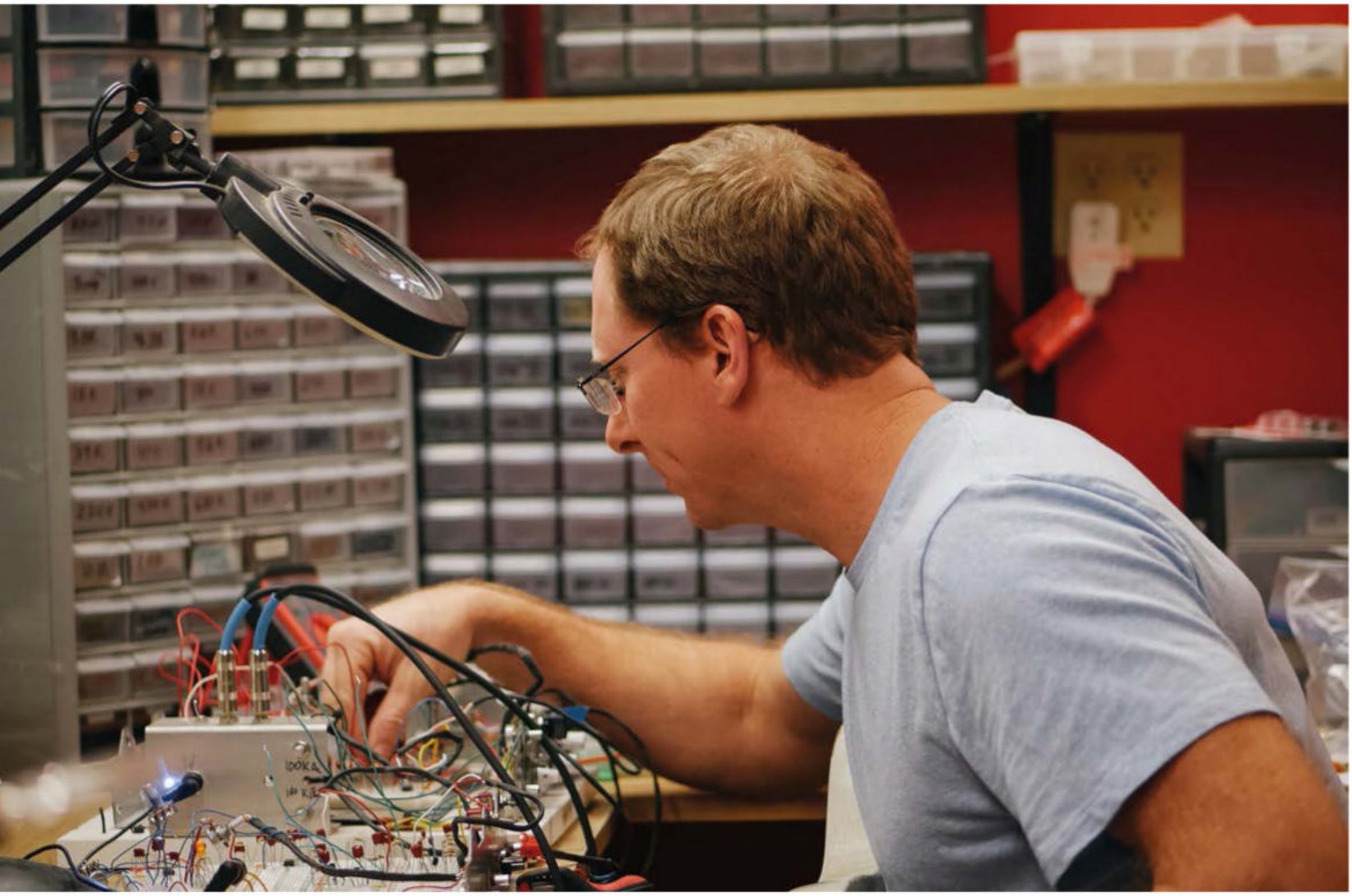
Although Wampler built several of his earlier pedals himself, once demand outstripped his ability to keep up, the Indiana native jobbed out the manufacturing effort to a company across the river to the south of him in Kentucky, and has more recently shifted to a deal with Boutique Amps Distribution, a California-based company that also provides manufacturing services for Friedman, Tone King, Egnater, Morgan, Bogner, and several other reputable brands.

"It's fantastic," says Wampler of the venture. "It clarified my life in a lot of ways. Gary Vaynerchuk has written a book called C*rush It!*, and he did an interview with me for that, and what [this deal] has done for me is in line with things he discusses in that book: it allows me to focus on things that I'm much better at, and enjoy it a lot more. For me, that's talking to customers, putting out content and creating guitar effects. That way, I don't have to spend my time staring at spreadsheets and calling retailers all across the world to see what they've got in stock, and trying to figure out where we're going to get 9mm screws. All those issues become Boutique Amps' problem, because those are the parts I didn't want to mess with. That's how our arrangement works: they take care of all the things I'm no good at and don't like doing."

Essentially, the partnership with Boutique Amps allows Wampler to work to his strengths, while a turnkey manufacturing option takes care of all practical matters related to getting the pedals built and out of the door, providing the kind of division of labour that, for lack thereof, plenty of promising small companies have been done in.

"Just because a person is good at circuitry or soldering does not necessarily mean that they'll be successful at creating a business that does the soldering," Wamper elaborates. "If your skillset is listening to guitar tones and trying to figure out how to make a product that sounds like a better Plexi-style pedal, that's not necessarily the same person that's going to be able to talk about profit margins with retailers in Switzerland. It's a different skillset."

In addition to outsourcing the manufacturing and relieving Wampler of the less thrilling pressures involved in his operation, the Boutique Amps deal has allowed Brian to shift his working life to an arrangement that better suits the rest of it.



ABOVE Now that he works from home, Brian is free to dedicate more time to the parts of the business he enjoys the most

"I used to work out of a big office building," he says, "and I had a bunch of employees that I had to manage every day. Now I have a couple of guys that work with me but we all work from our homes, and my days are half as long as they used to be. I used to work from sunup to sundown, and now there are a lot of days that, if it's nice out, you know, I'm just going to go take a walk for a while, maybe grab some lunch somewhere. I can take it easy and enjoy life more. Especially times like now, when my kids are home, I'm not gone so much."

NO MORE HEROES

In the early years, Wampler's signature designs for Brent Mason and Brad Paisley played a significant part in getting the company on its feet, and artist collaborations have remained a rewarding path, even while the concept of the guitar star is keeps shifting.

"We're getting ready to release something with Andy Woods," says Wampler, "and we're working with Pete Thorn and stuff. But the music world is different to how used to be. From that perspective, it's an interesting subject.

"For example, Cory Wong is a player that I respect immensely. He's a fantastic guitarist and very well known among players. But it's interesting how, in the past, if you mentioned Slash, everybody knew who you meant, whether they listened to country, blues, jazz or whatever. Today, you have segments of the population that love Cory Wong and everything he puts out but the people who are listening to Joe Bonamassa might not even know who Cory Wong is. So, it's interesting, what 'fame' is and what an 'artist' is in music circuits these days. Often, you hear the term 'influencer' thrown around more than 'artist'."

That said – and after briefly devolving into a joint moan about the state of the music business in general – Wampler agrees that no gear manufacturer is likely to stay afloat selling only to 'guitar heroes' anyway, or even to the limited fanbase of any of the remaining guitar stars. The hobby player remains the meat of the market – and that's exactly as it should be.

"I look at it kind of like golf clubs or tennis rackets or something," says Wampler. "You're always going to have the people that enjoy not only playing the sport or the craft but also enjoy being part of the community, looking at new products, buying new products and trading things with their friends. That's all part of the hobby. It's not just the sitting down and playing the pentatonic scale."

If Wampler were trading for one of his own pedals, what might it be? What's his favourite amid his own ever-expanding line?

"I always tell people my favourite pedals tend to be the ones we haven't released yet," he says, "because I haven't spent a ridiculous number of hours trying to make a bunch of videos and playing through them and all that. Of the things we have right now – and, being a guitar player, my opinion's probably going to change tomorrow – I like the Pantheon [overdrive]. And the Tumnus is always fun to play with, if you like that Klon-style 1kHz midrange boost."

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DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO RELIC A 1950S-STYLE SUNBURST FINISH

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

After a break for lacquer curing, sun fading and tinted clear coats, it's time to see how close we can get to the look of a vintage instrument

1 Reassembling the guitar before spraying the tinted clear coats allows it to fade quicker and be played during the evening

2 The fading becomes visible after only a few hours but the whole process takes several days to complete

3 The jar on the left contains clear lacquer and the jar on the right contains the same clear lacquer after a week in the sun

4 I use a mallet and a stone to chip lacquer along the edge of the body. The area on the left has been stained and wax-polished

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Last time you saw this guitar, I signed off on a rather uncertain note, with the outcome of this project largely dependant on aniline dye fading under UV light. Inevitably, after about two months of blazing sunshine, it clouded over and started raining just as I finished spraying. But as soon as the sunshine returned, the fully loaded Greco took up permanent residence in my garden.

After just a single day in the sun, the fading was noticeable. But the sunny spell was short-lived so I instead placed the guitar under a UV light in a tin foil tent to keep things moving on the dull days.

During the fading process, the red first loses its scarlet stridency and then, gradually, the maple figuring becomes more apparent around the edges. The unappealing (to me) 'clown burst' look is almost gone after a few days. As the red retreats towards the edges, the colour tone shifts from red to orange-brown in the transition areas. At the same time, the shading coats begin to show through the red to give it a cooler and slightly blue tint.

Watching the fading happen is pretty thrilling because, in bright sunshine, the look seems to improve almost by the hour. The hardest part is keeping a constant lookout for rain but, despite having to be on the ball meteorologically, sunlight is still the best option – if the body is placed only in front of a static UV light, you may end up with strongly defined tan lines under the knobs and pickguard, which isn't realistic.

Sharply defined fade lines should be seen beneath the poker chip, neck pickup ring and pointers. The scratchplate shading should only have sharp lines near the neck pickup, where it's closest to the body.

I eventually call it quits on the sunbathing after about a week, by which time the burst has faded significantly and the yellow has taken on a slightly mellower hue. After comparing notes with Neil Ivison (ivisonguitars.com), who just so happens to be refinishing his Les Paul at the same time as me, it seems that the fading might have gone quicker had I not sprayed the clear coats. To my eyes, the colours are still a little bright. But I'm banking on things toning down when my tinted clear coats are applied.

WORKSHOP

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TINT HINT

Whether they were custom colours or sunbursts, vintage finishes generally had clear gloss top coats. While the colours underneath would often fade, the clear coats would yellow and darken. As a result, when shooting for a vintage look, you have to be mindful of these simultaneous fading and darkening processes.

The usual procedure is to spray tinted clear lacquer to simulate the effect of aged top coats. So far, I have shied away from that because spraying tinted coats over the yellow and red might shield the colours from the UV light to some extent, thus slowing the fading process. I also don't want to spray tinted coats and then have them go too dark as I attempt to fade the burst.

Instead, I decide to spray the tinted clear coats after fading the sunburst. But there's a twist. Rather than use clear lacquer that has been tinted with pigments, I age the lacquer before I spray it – a tip shared by Canadian luthier Fred Gabrsek (freddysfrets.com).

I was a little sceptical when I first poured some clear gloss nitrocellulose into a jam jar and put it outside in the sunlight but it changed colour with remarkable speed. At first, it darkened and took on a slightly yellow appearance. After a week or so, it had turned to amber and, after about a fortnight, it began moving towards a strong brownish honey-gold hue.

There's nothing contrived or phoney about the colour either – all the changes occur due to UV light. Eventually though, the changes slow to a standstill, which I confirm by ageing a second batch of lacquer. Both are left in the sun side by side and here the second batch soon catches up with the first. Therefore, I can be reasonably confident that the colour of the guitar after I've sprayed this lacquer will be stable, given that the top coats are about as aged as they are ever going to be.

First, I spray a few more clear coats and level them with 320-grit paper. The sun-aged clear lacquer is then mixed with thinners in a 60:40 ratio and sprayed using the Preval kit that I used for the yellow when I sprayed the sunburst. I find that the Preval kit can be a bit spluttery when the lacquer container is full but sprays more evenly with lower lacquer levels.

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5 Having a genuine Burst to use for reference is a massive help but the chipped areas need wax and stain

6 The chipped and relic'd edge combines with visible checking lines and the red grain filler shows through the faded cherry lacquer

7 Scraping, sanding, staining and buffing the play wear creates a smooth, natural look

Doing all of the tinted coats in quick succession is tempting, because the guitar immediately looks a great deal better. But experience has taught me that the apparent depth and shade of the aged lacquer changes as it dries, and should be examined under various light conditions.

If possible, gauge your progress against other vintage guitars or high-quality photos of the real thing, for which *Guitar.com* is a tremendous resource. Looking at the binding will give you the clearest idea of how things are progressing. Remember, you can always spray more tinted coats if necessary but if you overdo it, you're stuck.

The improvement in the overall shade is undeniable but I will need to spray a lot more sun-tinted lacquer before the binding looks right. So rather than make the lacquer too thick, I mix some Colortone Vintage Amber and Medium Brown stain into the remaining aged lacquer and shade the binding using my airbrush. Afterwards, I spray two more coats of clear lacquer to give me something to cut back and polish.

FINISHING THE FINISH

We've covered the finishing process before. In short, I sand the surface of the lacquer using wet and dry abrasive paper that I soak in water with a dash of washing-up liquid. I work my way through 800, 1,000 and 1,500-grit paper, and follow up with 4,000, 6,000 and 8,000-grit Micro-Mesh.

Along with the dings, dents, scratches and lacquer checking, all the 1950s Les Paul examples I've examined have high gloss finishes, so I complete the process by polishing with Meguiar's ScratchX. I'm left with a very shiny and new-looking guitar. Admittedly, that was never the end goal. But when doing an aged finish, I prefer to approximate a factory finish and work backwards rather than stopping short of the conventional final stages.

ICE-AGEING

With perfect serendipity, Neil Ivison sends me a photo of his newly acquired deep freezer, along with a message saying, "I think you're the only person who'll find this as exciting as me". I'm not embarrassed to admit he's right.

As a solution to the lacquer-checking challenge, a return trip to Worcester is certainly more appealing than spending several hours with a craft knife attempting to mimic Tom Murphy.

We arrange a visit but first I have a few things to attend to. If you closely examine old guitars with lacquer checking, you'll notice how the cracks form around the dents and dings. Whether you're using inverted air duster canisters or a freezer, you should 'damage' your finish before inducing the checking to achieve convincing results.

It's even better if you can borrow the real thing to help guide the process, and my generous friend Andrew Raymond of Bath store Vintage & Rare Guitars (vintageandrareguitars.com) obliges with one of his favourites: the Grainger Burst, a guitar Joe Bonamassa has played in concert. The Grainger has some areas with serious playing wear but, for the most part, small dents are evenly distributed all over the body. Relatively few have actually broken through the finish.

Those who have engaged in relic'ing before will know that bunches of keys are a popular tool – and for good reason; they work really well. But rather than randomly dropping them onto the guitar from a great height, I exercise caution and vary the height between about 10 and 20cm. This induces the tiny dents I'm looking for, along with the occasional larger dent and shallow chip. I also do this with the hardware and plastics in situ, so that there are no dents in areas that would ordinarily be shielded.

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8 The guitar is ready for reassembly and it's the last chance to see the unfaded cherry in the poker chip, knob and pickguard areas

9 Adding dents and chips to the finish before the body goes into the freezer allows the checking lines to form around them

10 The checking lines formed across the body exactly as we had hoped and it's a lot easier than doing it with a blade

At this point in the relic'ing process, guitars tend to look pretty awful – like new guitars that have suffered inappropriate and incongruous damage. But remember that this is a process, and things will look worse before they look 'better'. I take the guitar up to Neil, where it spends a night in his freezer. The following day, he sends me photos of the results.

We're both absolutely delighted to see that lateral checking lines have formed on the body, exactly as we had hoped. Neil suggests a second night in the freezer to try and get the neck and headstock to crack a bit more but I decide against it. The body checking looks so authentic that I don't want to risk overdoing it and, if the neck and headstock need more checking, I can always do that with a blade.

DARK ARTS

Despite the checking, this still looks to me like a peculiarly damaged new guitar. Something is required to bring everything together and, for me, that 'something' tends to be Colron stains (colron.co.uk), specifically Jacobean Oak and Antique Pine. These are from back when Colron stains were naphtha-based. These days, they're water-based and therefore nowhere near as effective for our relic'ing needs, so you may be better off with Rustins equivalents (rustins.ltd).

The stains wick into the dents and checking lines but should be used judiciously because the checking lines don't look quite realistic when they're too obvious. With this guitar, they're only visible when the light hits them at certain angles – just like the figuring in the maple veneer.

To inflict some 'damage' around the rear edges of the body, I use a small stone and a mallet. Placing the stone against the body, I only need to tap the stone lightly to crack the finish. I can then use my thumbnail or a dental scraper to flake it away. I follow up with stain and light-brown Liberon antique furniture wax (liberon.co.uk) to give the exposed mahogany an oxidised and buffed appearance. It helps to have the Grainger Burst on hand as a visual reference.

Play wear on the upper bout is simulated by scraping the lacquer along the binding line with a curved craft blade. I round over the corner of the binding in that area too, and then sand and buff out the scraper marks to create a smooth transition from lacquer to exposed wood. I complete the job using Antique Pine stain and wax polish.

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11 Just like the real thing, the checking lines' visibility varies depending on the viewing angle

12 A dark stain has been used to highlight the checking lines in the area around the switch

13 Headstock relic'ing is minimal but there's a lot of very fine lacquer checking that will become more obvious over time

14 The finished (for now) product, carefully aged for a vintage aesthetic

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It's actually quite a long process but eventually, with everything looking as it should, I'm ready to reassemble the guitar. With all the parts back on the body, I gently knock back the gloss in selected areas using some 4,000-grit Micro-Mesh. The finish will continue to age naturally and I may decide to do a bit more relic'ing at some point. But, for now, I'm just going to enjoy playing this guitar again.

This is my first serious attempt at replicating a late 1950s sunburst finish and I am very pleased with the outcome. Throughout this process, I've tried a variety of new things, including unfamiliar spraying equipment and mixing my own colours and tints, not to mention ageing lacquers in jam jars. The final colour maybe isn't quite what I wanted but lots of genuine Bursts do have this sort of look.

I believe the best way to learn new skills is to try things for yourself, and I now have a greater understanding of how parameters can be manipulated to determine outcomes. I'll be less intense with the yellow and heavier with the blue/brown tint coats next time, for a cooler and darker look for the shading. I also think Neil might have been right about that second night in the freezer but hey, I have a shed, and winter is coming. G

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AMPLIFIER FAQ

Following on from last month's question about a pre-war Gibson EH-185, Rift boss Chris Fantana's clone build progresses to the chassis

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

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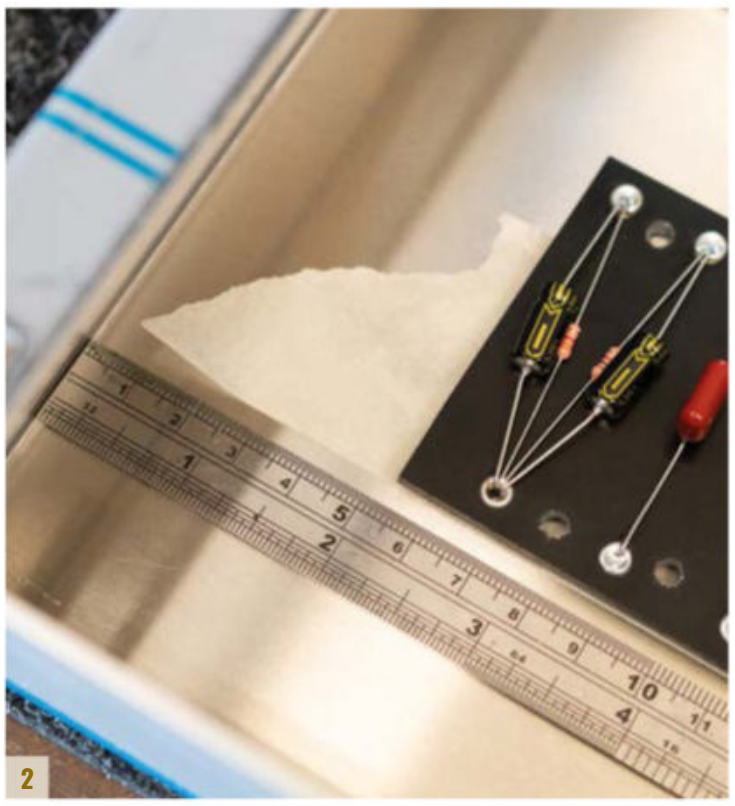

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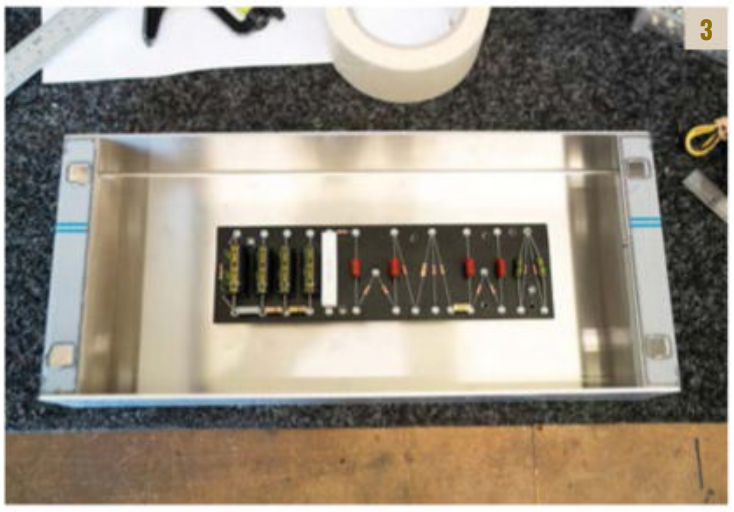

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1 Marking the position of the valve sockets

2 The board location inside the chassis is critical

3 Mounted on quarter-inch standoffs, the board sits proudly inside the chassis

4 Checking valve socket position relative to the board helps ensure a neat final layout

Last time around, I researched, designed and populated the component board of my long-gestating EH-185 clone. Now it's time to start work on the chassis layout. I always like to draw my designs using 1:1 scale on the computer and, as such, I need to know the chassis dimensions to ensure that everything fits perfectly.

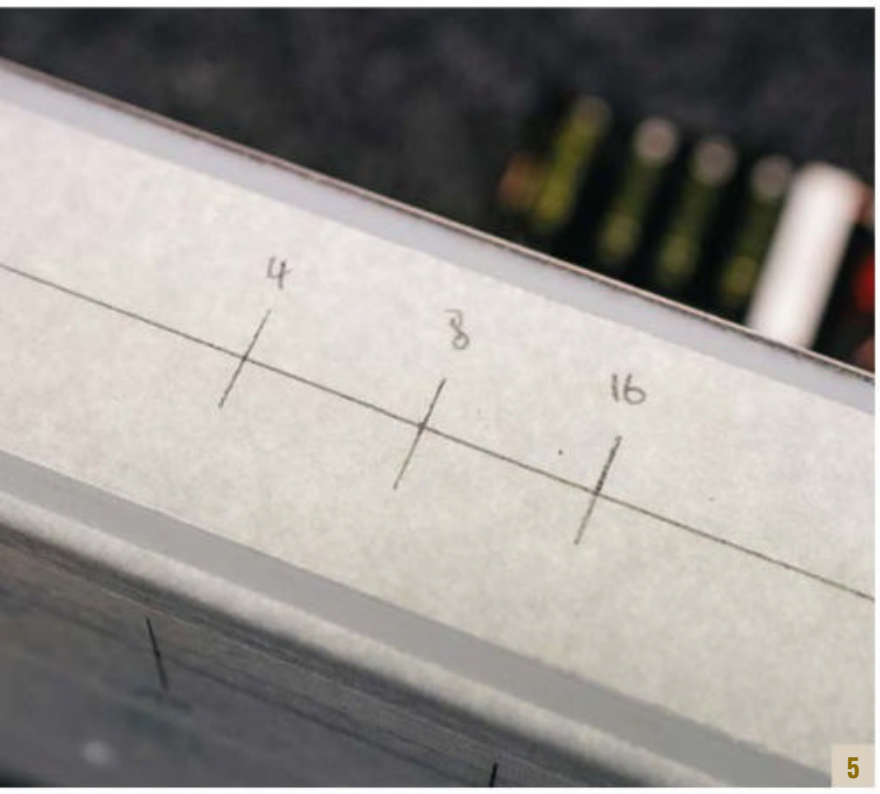
Tubetown.de sells a range of blank aluminium chassis in various sizes and the 365 x 160 x 65mm TT-CH062 unit is perfectly attuned to small projects such as this one. Though, with seven valves to incorporate, it might be a tight squeeze.

With the valves on one side of the board and the controls on the other, I start to draw on my flying leads and connect everything together. The layout is only a rough version for now. It allows me to gauge the location of the components relative to each other and to indicate whether I might need to move things around to optimise the design.

There are a few improvements that I can make to the original circuit design, mainly from a reliability point of view. Firstly, the 6L6 output valves do not have either control-grid or screen-grid stopper resistors. The former is used to prevent parasitic oscillations and to help smooth out unpleasant distortion under overdrive. The latter is used to protect the screen grid from over-dissipation when the valve is overdriven – a valve-killer for sure. I've chosen nominal values of 1k5 for the control grids and 470r 1W for the screens as a starting point.

There are other benefits to using stopper resistors in the amplifier, such as on the input stage to create an RC (low-pass) filter with the input capacitance of the first valve. This creates an RF attenuator for anything above our chosen cut-off point, which in this case is about 20kHz.

Secondly, I've added protection diodes (1N4007) in series with the high-voltage supply to the rectifier valve.



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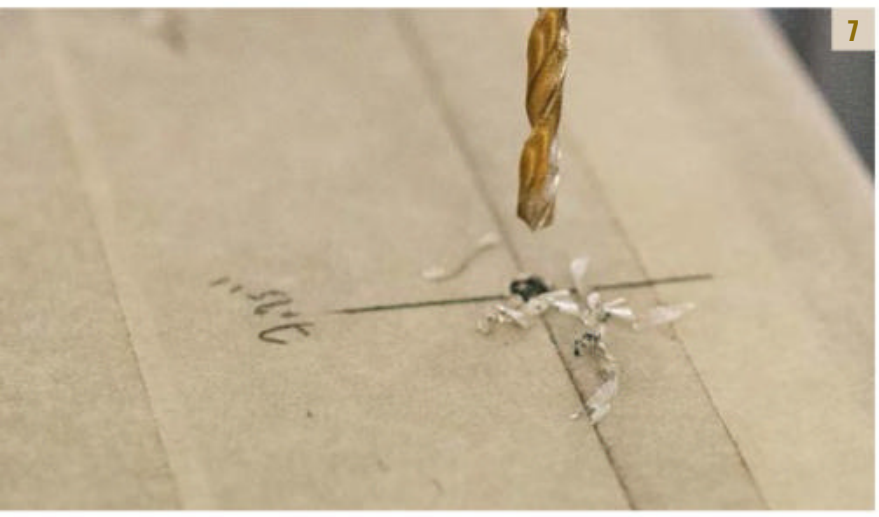
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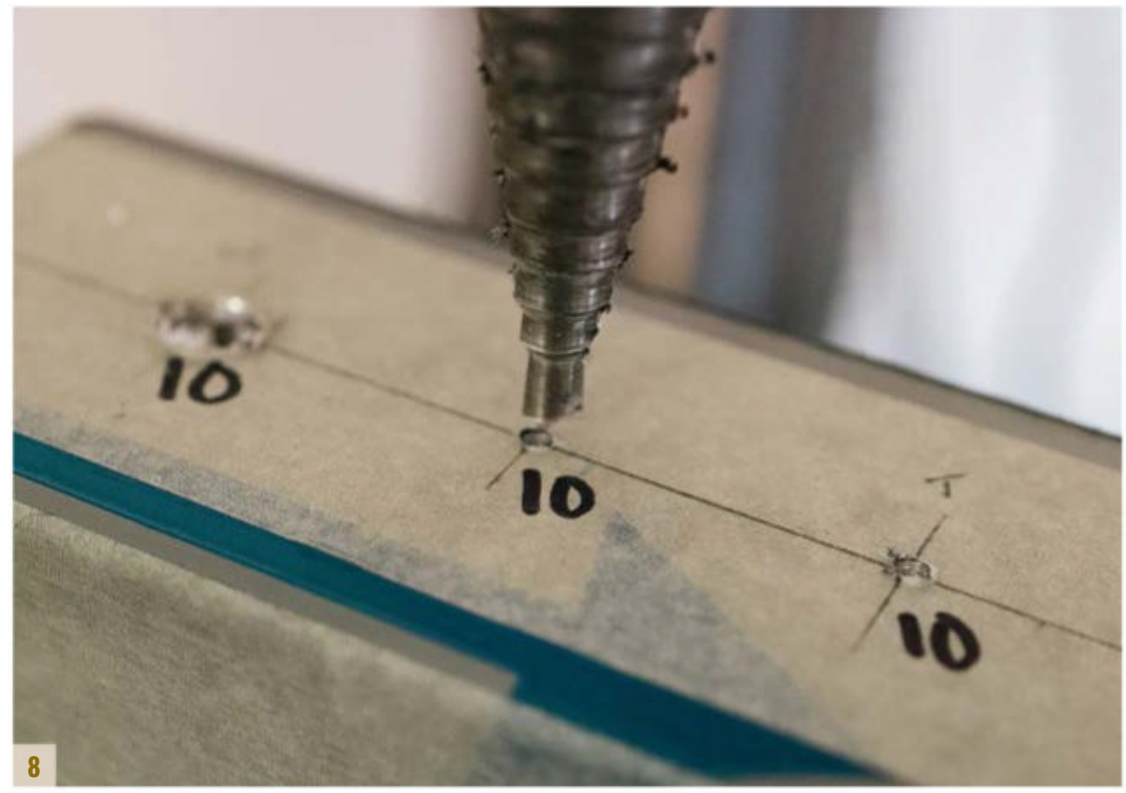

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These protect both the circuit and mains transformer from damage should the valve fail. For only a couple of pence each, it's a no-brainer.

TRANSFORMERS

During my research into the EH-185, I found that detailed information about the transformers is limited, at best. The schematic I have gives a model number for the mains unit but not the output. Further online searches reveal little to no concrete evidence and the information gleaned from forums and the like seems to be contradictory. Fortunately, designing a 6L6-based output stage and power supply to produce 20 watts is a relatively an straightforward affair, providing you know how to read the datasheets.

Let's start with the power supply. First, I need to know how much current I'll need to switch on the valves. All of them except the 5U4 rectifier require a 6.3 volt supply. The two 6L6s need 900mA each, the three 6SQ7s use 300mA each, and the single 6N7 needs 800mA. Add those together and we get a total of 3.5A. The 5U4 needs 5 volts at 3A, so that's easy.

Finally, we need to choose our high-voltage winding. I'd like to have about 350 volts on the anodes (plates) of the 6L6s, which combined with an output transformer primary impedance of 6k6-8k should give us our 20 watts. The RCA datasheet for 6L6s recommends a 5k transformer at 270 volts for 17.5w so the extra grunt should get us to 20w easily.

Carefully calculating the power requirements for the rest of the circuit, I'll need a high voltage supply of about 630 volts, rated at 140mA or more. Tube Town stocks a unit (TT-5E3-PW) rated for 640 volts at 150mA, with 6.3v 3.5A and 5v 3A windings too, which is perfect. They also sell an output transformer (TT-5E3-OT) rated at 25w with a primary impedance of 8k. It has 4, 8, and 16-ohm outputs so we'll have lots of options for speaker connections.

5 Marking the rear panel for speaker connections

6 Front panel spacing for the controls

7, 8 Pilot holes are drilled before using a stepped drill bit to enlarge the hole to the final size

9 A deburring tool is used to clean up the holes

10 Using a punch to create the IEC socket hole

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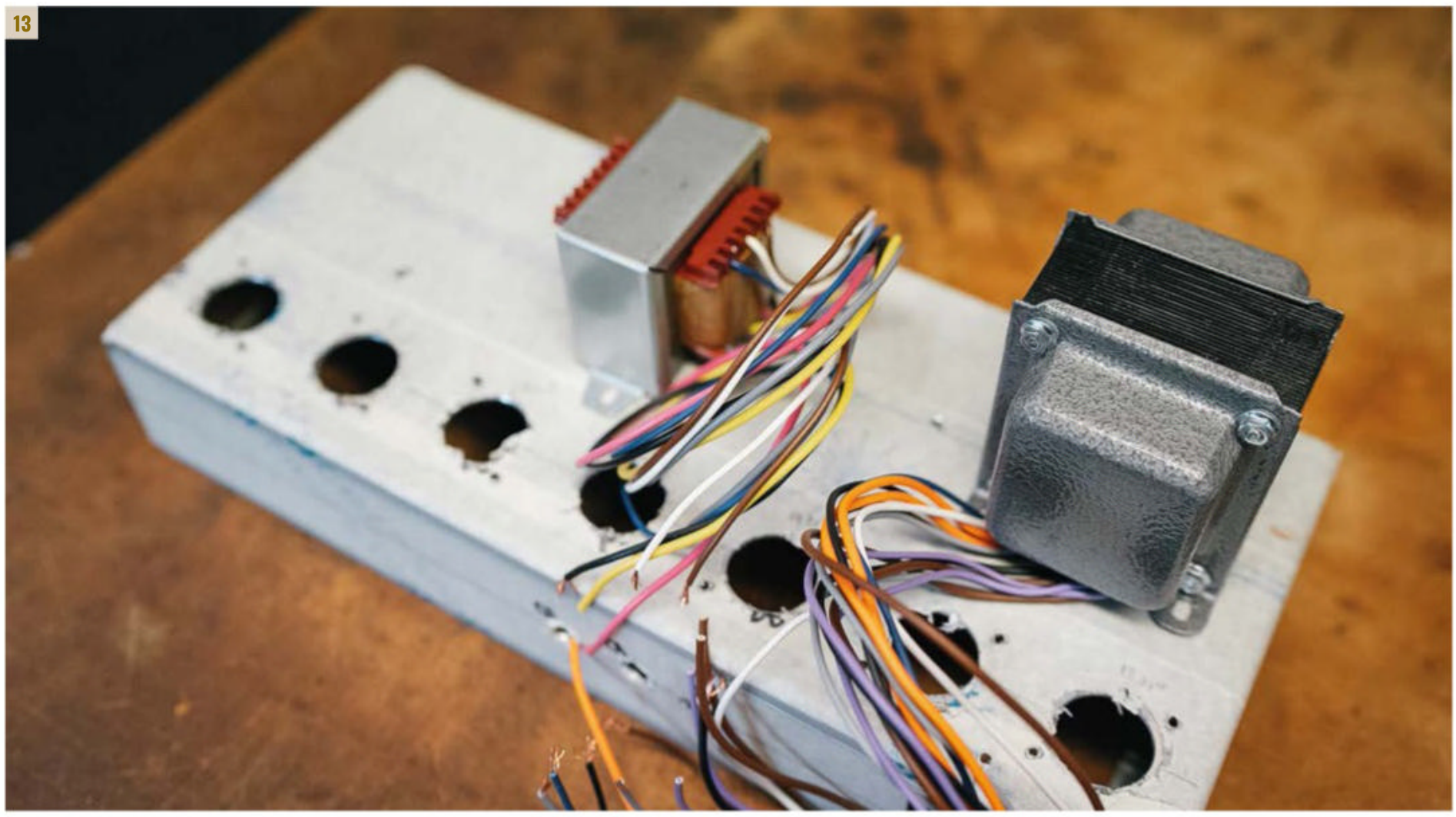

13

11, 12 Fitting the socket in place

13 The transformer set was supplied by Tube Town in Germany

CHASSIS MACHINING

Now the real work begins. I begin by choosing a mounting position for the component board inside the chassis. Using the seven octal valve sockets as a rough guide, I decide on a location that is 2.125 inches from the right-hand side, when viewed from the valve side of the chassis. On the Y-axis, the board sits directly central. I can now drill the M3 mounting holes for the board that will sit on quarter-inch standoffs. With the board set in place, I can start finalising the positions of the valve sockets.

As a general rule of thumb, I like to position the sockets about 1.25 inches from the rear of the chassis to allow adequate room for a neat lead dress. I draw a datum line and then I can start to mark the positions along the length of the chassis. Checking the datasheets for each valve, I can find out the preferred mounting position and location for each one relative to another.

Some valves, such as the KT66, require at least 2.5 inches of distance between the mounting centres, in any orientation. In this case, there are no such restrictions but a two-inch gap is a good starting point. The first valve will be 1.25 inches from the edge and the others at two-inch intervals thereafter. With all of the sockets marked, I can now drill them out to the required size of 26mm.

Using the same method as above, I mark the positions of both the front controls, the rear speaker sockets and the location of the mains/fuse connector. These are then drilled and punched out to the required size, as before.

That's it for this month. With some good progress made, our EH-185 is starting to take shape. Come back next time to see how the project develops.

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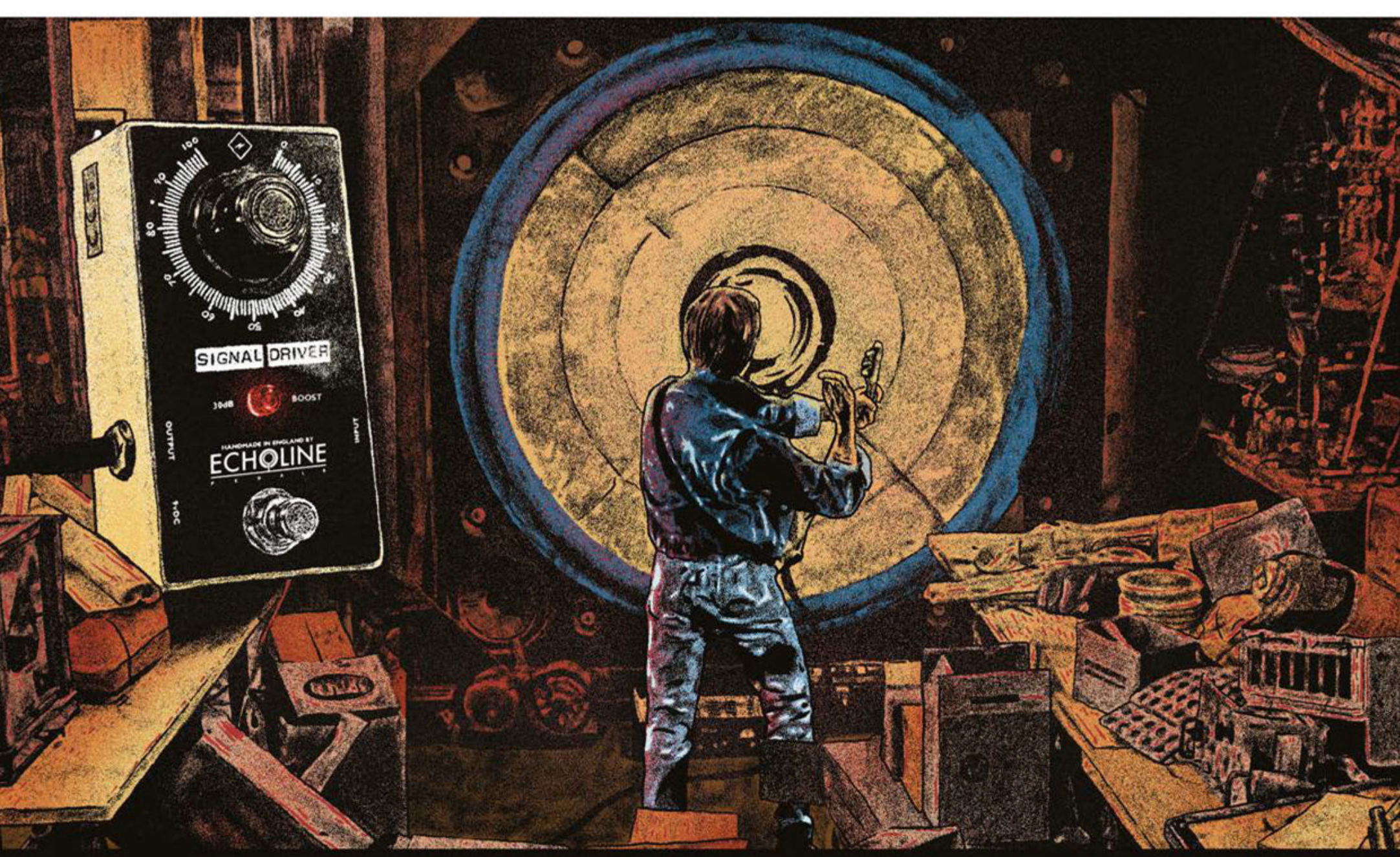

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1 Brenden's 2015 American Design Experience Jazzmaster in Shoreline Gold. It's really a lovely guitar

2 The tuners were barely serviceable but this wasn't simply a case of mechanical failure

TECH TALK

JAZZMASTER TUNER TROUBLE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

From the fretboard to tuners, changes in temperature and humidity can play havoc with guitars

I'll tell you what – tuner trouble is bringing in the big bucks this summer. From my recent column on the Trini Lopez with the rough-hewn shafts to today's subject, it's been one after the other. I'm grateful for the work but, as the saying goes, when it rains it pours.

Recently, my friend Brenden reached out with a very special 2015 Fender Jazzmaster in Shoreline Gold, one of the most alluring and rare custom colours. But the instrument happens to be even rarer than its colour suggests: it's a product of Fender's American Design Experience, which began in 2011 as a visitor's centre mainstay for guitar fans on pilgrimage to the Fender factory in Corona.

Visitors could hand-select bodies and necks, spec out their dream guitars and have them built and shipped to their home in a matter of 90 days, which is a far more exciting souvenir than a personalised license plate keychain or a branded coffee mug. What better way to remember your trip to California than your dream guitar showing up at your door?

In 2014, this impressive programme was expanded to the non-nomadic masses via a portal on fender.com. Since then it has been turned into the Mod Shop, albeit with fewer features. Brenden made his order before all that though, and because he was able to customise the specifics of his guitar, the one he ended up with may actually be one of the lightest Jazzmasters I've ever held, and it also has the biggest neck I've ever seen on a stock Fender. It's beautiful wood, don't get me wrong, but given my predilection for rather slim necks, it's a case of 'nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there'.

The guitar came to me for one of my famous offset setups, which I was more than happy to oblige. But there was a secondary issue of serious tuner slippage to address. As one rotates the tuner buttons, the shafts are meant to turn. In this case, it took nearly a full turn to see any response from the tuner shafts, which made tuning problematic, to say the least. My first thought was, "These tuners are bad and should be replaced," and while I was essentially correct, I hadn't yet seen the whole picture.

A little background: Brenden ordered this guitar in 2015 and the neckplate bears not only the date but also his name – again, what a fantastic souvenir. Yet thanks to the various circumstances of life, this guitar never saw any actual playing time until probably about a month ago.

For five years, it sat in its case in an unregulated environment, going through many heat and humidity changes. The guitar held up remarkably well considering, and the metallic finish still looks brand new. The rosewood fretboard, however, was one of the driest I've ever encountered. Fret sprouting was a symptom of the bone-dry board, as was the pale hue of the wood itself, more of a tan-and-red affair than the deep chocolate brown one might hope for.

After a few judicious lemon oil treatments and a few days with a damp sponge in the case, the fretboard not only looked and felt better but those sharp fret ends disappeared almost entirely. The dangers of humidity cannot be overstated.

3 When I tried to remove the tuners, I found they were stuck firmly in place. It took considerable effort to get the high E machine out this far

4 This is the first time I've ever seen a headstock hold the tuners so firmly

5 Even having the tuners out this far gave me a good idea of what the true problem was

6 To widen the holes, I gently drilled them out to 1/4"

7 ...and then to 17/32"

I performed my usual due diligence during the setup, checking electronics and slotting the nut properly, adding a shim as you do with Jazzmasters to increase break angle over the bridge. I even installed a Mastery. But those tuners were last on my list, the final issue left untouched.

OFF THE PEGHEAD

I removed the mounting screws from these Fender-stamped Kluson-style tuners and tried to extract the high E tuner for inspection. I pulled… and pulled… and pulled. Then I scratched my head, wondering if I'd somehow missed a screw. Nope, all accounted for on my workbench. So, I pulled again.

This tuner was not budging. It didn't matter how hard I pulled. I tried the B, the G, even the A – all the same. Eventually, I had to use a wooden block situated on the tips of the tuner shafts themselves to get enough surface area to allow me to push them out, at great effort. Thankfully, they moved – but only part of the way.

In all of my many years as a guitar tech, I have never seen a set of tuners stuck in a Fender headstock. "This is really wild," I thought to myself.

At this point, I was able to finally free the tuners from the headstock – and this is where the real issue finally became clear to me. Remember when I mentioned that the guitar had been through many heat and humidity cycles, and that the fretboard had dried out? It seems that, through these environmental changes, the maple of the

8

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8 After drilling, the tuners slid right into place without catching

9 After finishing the setup, this one plays like a dream

10 ...except for that neck

11 Shoreline Gold is one of the most alluring custom colours in the Fender catalogue

12 Six perfectly functional tuners. A job well done

10

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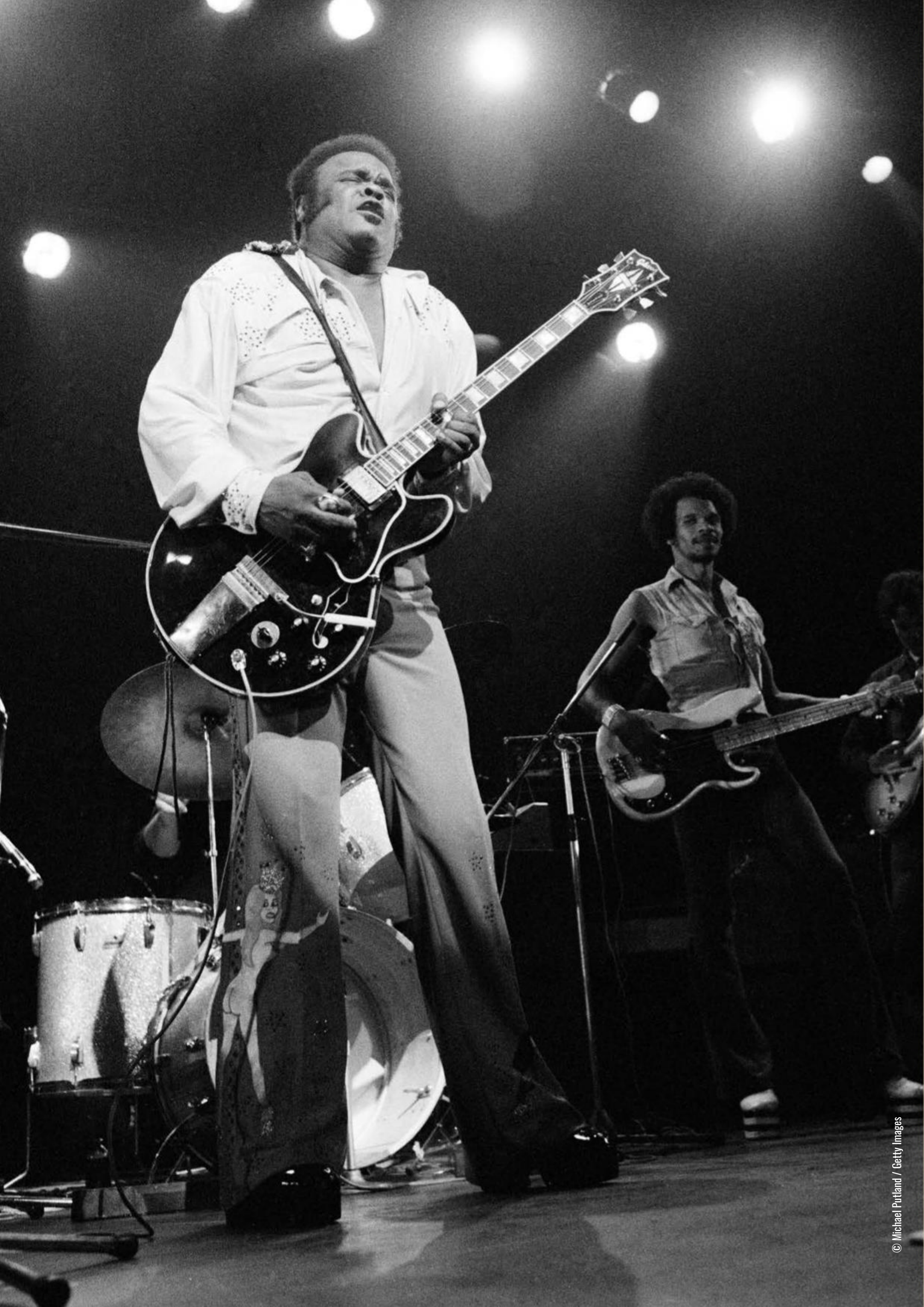
neck had contracted so drastically that the holes drilled in the headstock had seized around the tuner shafts themselves, gripping them so tightly that they could no longer be easily turned. This is why it took a revolution or two of the key to force them into motion.

At this point in the guitar's life, it didn't seem feasible that any amount of added humidification would help, so I elected to drill out the headstock to the proper size for the shafts. The tuner shafts measure 6mm or 15/32", and the headstock holes had closed up right around them. I first gently widened the hole to 1/4" followed up by a 17/32" bit to free up more space.

Sadly, because the tuners had been used with the headstock gripping them so tightly, the internal gears were just too damaged to salvage. Even with the extra breathing room, they no longer engaged properly when they were turned. Fortunately, Brenden provided another set of Gotoh tuners that fit and operated perfectly.

Upon collection, I told Brenden to keep an eye on the humidity with this one but also let him know that we were mostly out of danger at this point. I'm confident the repair will hold up over time and, at the end of the job, that guitar turned out to be one hell of a good instrument – even if the neck was far too much of a baseball bat for my medium-sized hands. G

For more where this came from, follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen



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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **FREDDIE KING**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

In our final foray into the stylings of the legendary Three Kings of blues, we tackle the searing style of Freddie King

Freddie King was born and raised in Texas but his true guitar awakening came in 1949 when his family moved to Chicago, and he was exposed to the spellbinding guitar styles of Muddy Waters, T-Bone Walker and Howlin' Wolf in the city's South Side nightclubs.

Freddie started playing as a sideman while he was still a teen, but by the mid-1950s, he was striking out on his own. Rejected by Chess Records and the East Side blues scene for his perceived vocal similarity to BB King, Freddie decamped to Chicago's burgeoning West Side scene in the late '50s.

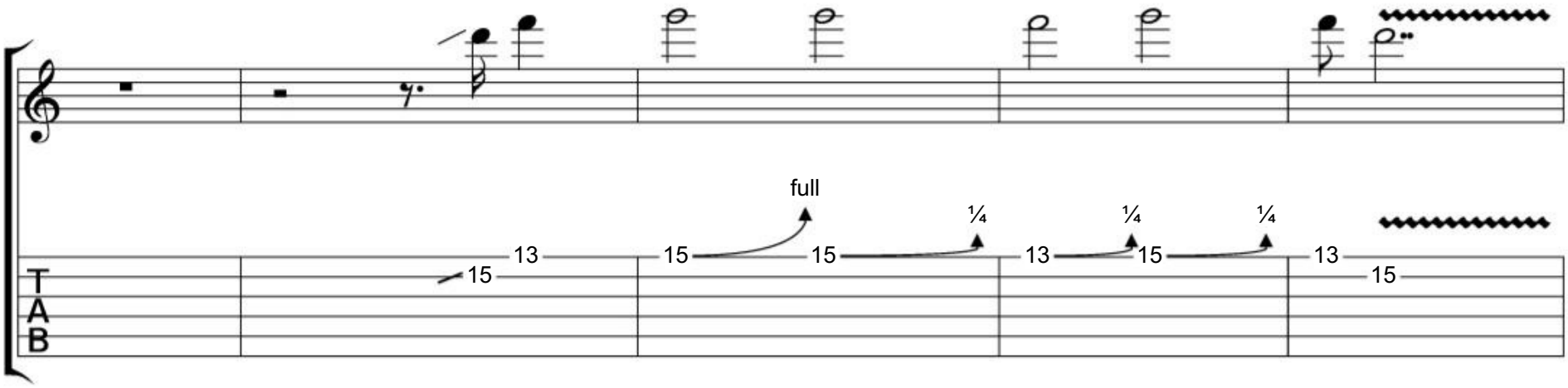
Becoming a star name with the West Side's upstart Cobra Records, Freddie's fusion of the more relaxed Texas blues sound with the raw Chicago style set him apart from the crowd and gave his music a fresher and more kinetic feel than his peers, as evidenced on iconic tracks such as *Hide Away* and *Have You Ever Loved A Woman*.

It was this vitality that helped make Freddie one of the most influential figures on the key players in the British blues explosion of the 1960s, with Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Jeff Beck and Mick Taylor all citing him as a huge influence, along with fellow Texan Stevie Ray Vaughan later on. Let's dive in.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has more than 10 years of experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

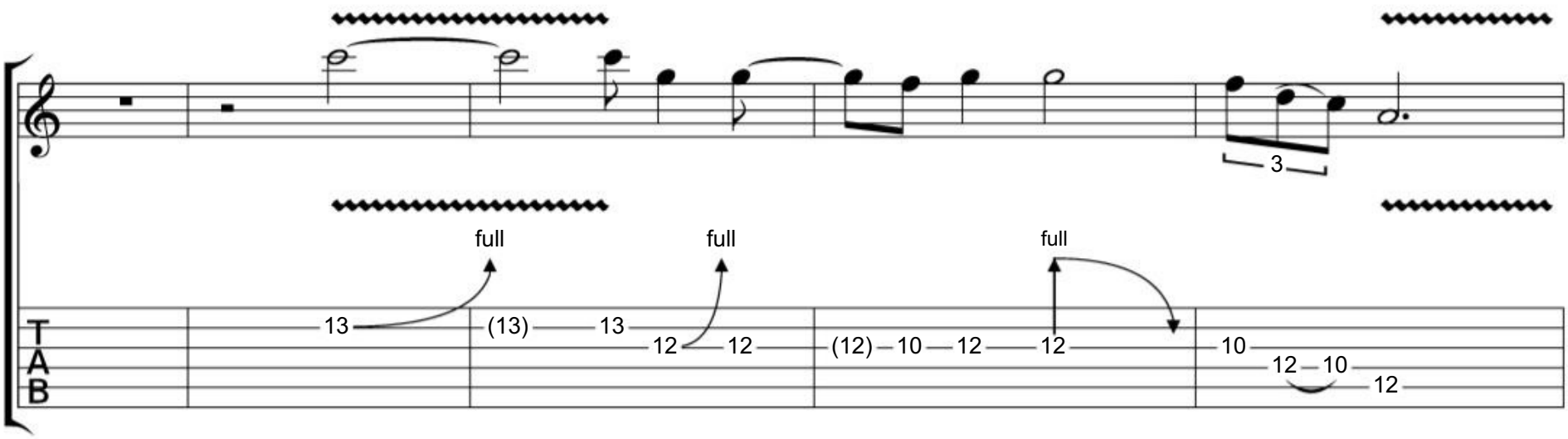
LICK 1

This first lick showcases Freddie's use of string bends. This is a stylistic element of his playing that you can also hear passed down through Clapton and SRV. Using the second shape of the D minor pentatonic scale, you're doing a series of four string bends in a row on the E string. The first bend is a full-tone, the following three are quarter-tones. The lick begins right before beat 1. There's a slight push on the lick's intro.



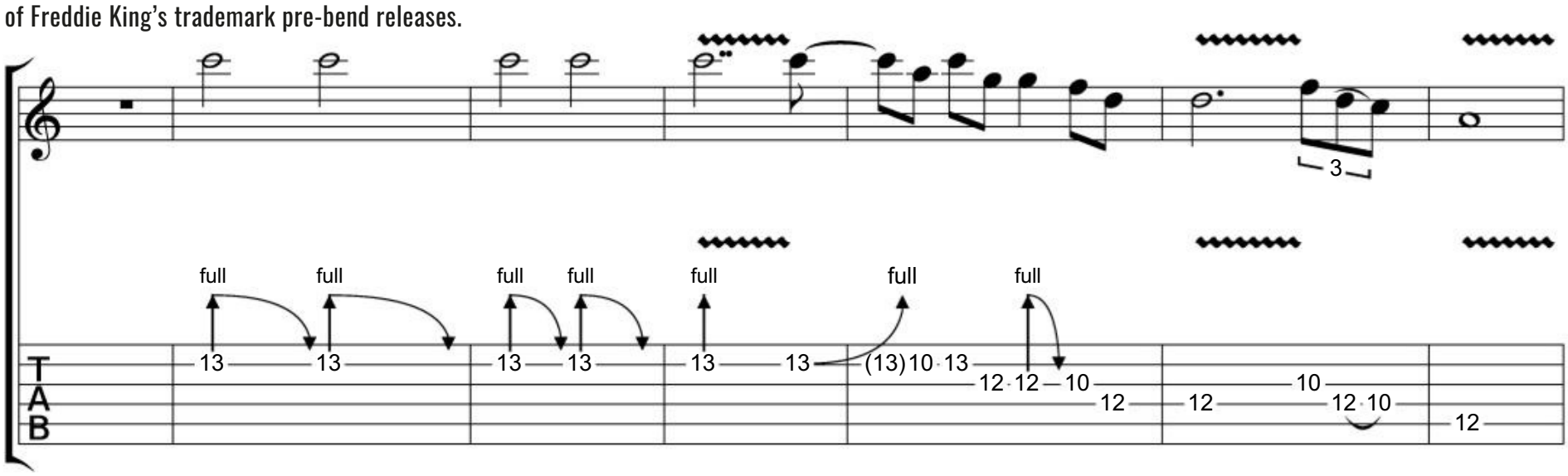
LICK 2

This lick is a first-shape pentatonic lick that shows off a typical Freddie King-style descent. Begin with a big string bend on the B string, with gratuitous amounts of vibrato to make it sing. The final phrase is a speedy four-note run. Freddie didn't often play fast but, when he did, he would put in these little flurries of notes that you can also hear crop up in Peter Green's playing.



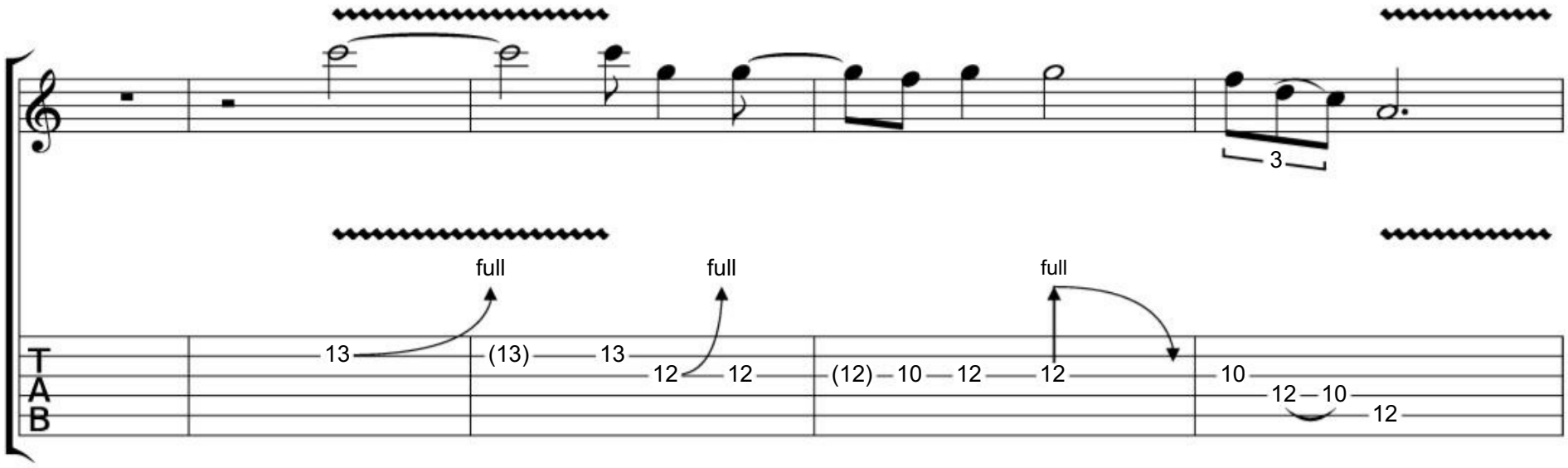
LICK 3

Freddie had a very vocal guitar style. He often thought in short phrases and used space to his advantage. This lick is made up of a few phrases and also uses the backing rhythm to mimic certain rhythmic hooks in the lead line. It moves between the second and first shapes of the pentatonic scale and contains lots of Freddie King's trademark pre-bend releases.



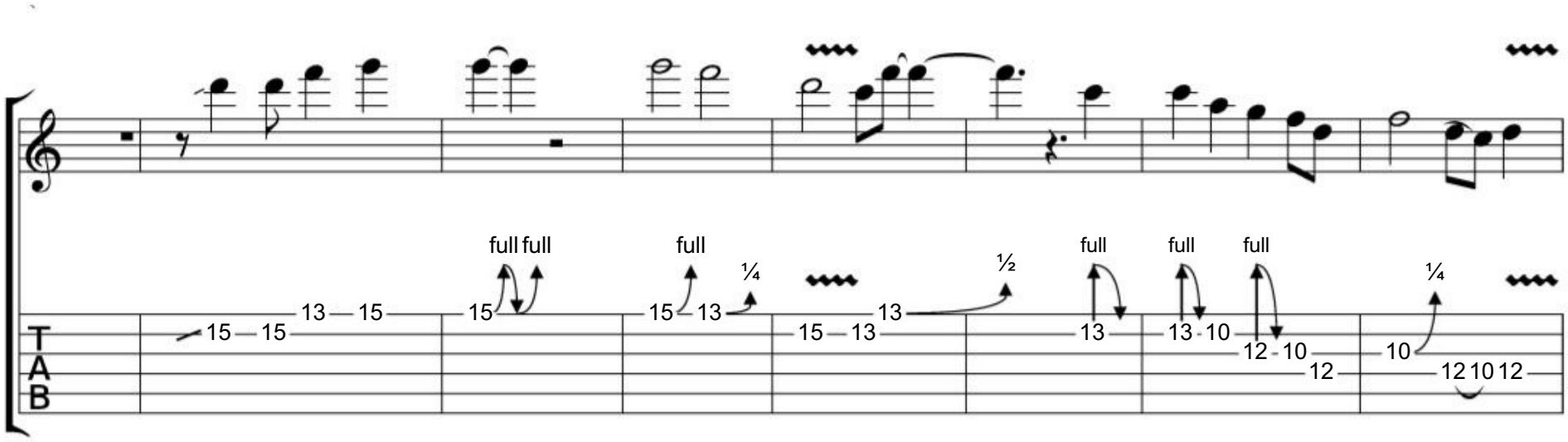
LICK 4

The fourth lick opens with more pre-bend releases. When you play these, pick them hard and try to make them really sing like Freddie would. His playing often sounded almost pained and he attacked the guitar with a lot of passion. To nail that authentic King feel, pick hard to get a really snappy attack to the notes you play.



LICK 5

The opening bending phrase goes back and forth between two notes on alternating quarter and eighth notes, which gives the bar a swing feel. There's a descend to the fifth pentatonic shape before hitting the root note on the D string again. This is a technique many players have used over the years, including ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons. Apply lots of vibrato to the sustained notes and make sure the final bend sings. Pick it hard and drag the bend to its peak.



TRY IT YOURSELF

Each of these licks is in the key of D Minor but, because they're all based in the pentatonic scale, you can easily and quickly transpose them to any other key you wish. These parts will not only give you an instant Freddie King vibe, they also should help you see how Freddie's techniques were passed down to the British blues greats of the 1960s.

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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE JOHN LENNON

WORDS ROD FOGG

In the first of a series in which we look at the chord shapes and sequences used by The Beatles, we get inside the head of John Lennon and find a propulsive rhythm guitarist with an ear for original chord changes

It's impossible to overstate the impact that The Beatles had on the course of popular music, and the root of this paradigm-shifting genius was the fact that they were a band equipped with three prodigiously talented and breathtakingly original songwriters.

In additon to their formidable abilities as writers, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison were also gifted and inventive guitar players, whose varied approaches to the instrument can be heard all over the band's peerless catalogue, as well as in their respective post-Beatles works.

We're kicking off our examination of these three remarkable musicians by inspecting the style and chordal approach of John Lennon, to coincide with what would have been his 80th birthday. It's fascinating to look at the way he approached guitar parts on those early Beatles recordings, both those he'd taken the lead on and the McCartney-penned numbers that he contributed to in the studio. Have fun with these chords and we'll be back with more John Lennon-inspired harmony next month.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

FIGURE 1

Although capable of both skill and sophistication in his guitar playing, Lennon was often happy to strum open-string chords on his Gibson J-160E. Here, we have three chords of the kind that any beginner can get their hands around. Try playing G and E minor followed by two bars of D for a four-bar structure, or four bars of G and E minor and then back and forth between G and D to make eight bars. The Beatles did not always use exotic chords but they did have a knack for using commonplace chords in interesting structures.

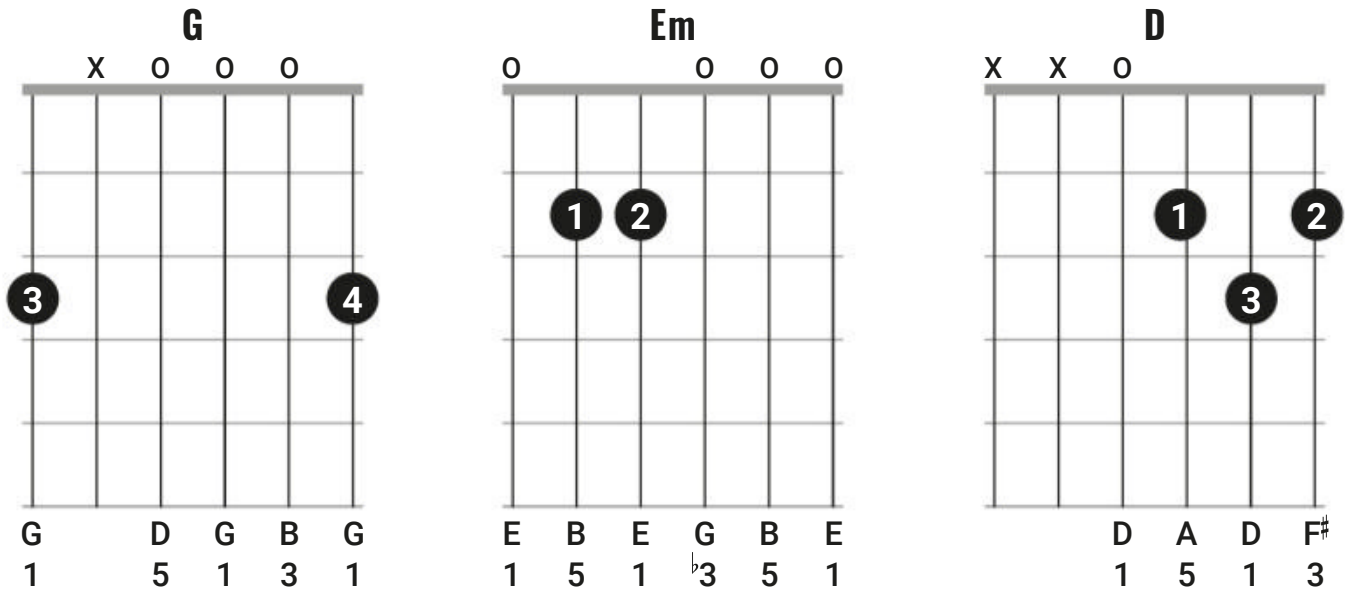


FIGURE 2

Here, we're inspired by a rhythm guitar part that Lennon put together to play over a song that is usually credited to McCartney. Counting in a fairly fast four to the bar, play down, up, down strums, three to a beat in a triplet feel. It's not easy and John was justifiably proud of coming up with this guitar part. We're using four-note chords because, in an interview, Lennon once described how he first learnt to play on his mother's banjo: if you stick to four strings, you end up using some interesting inversions. You can have some fun reordering these chords into different eight-bar phrases.

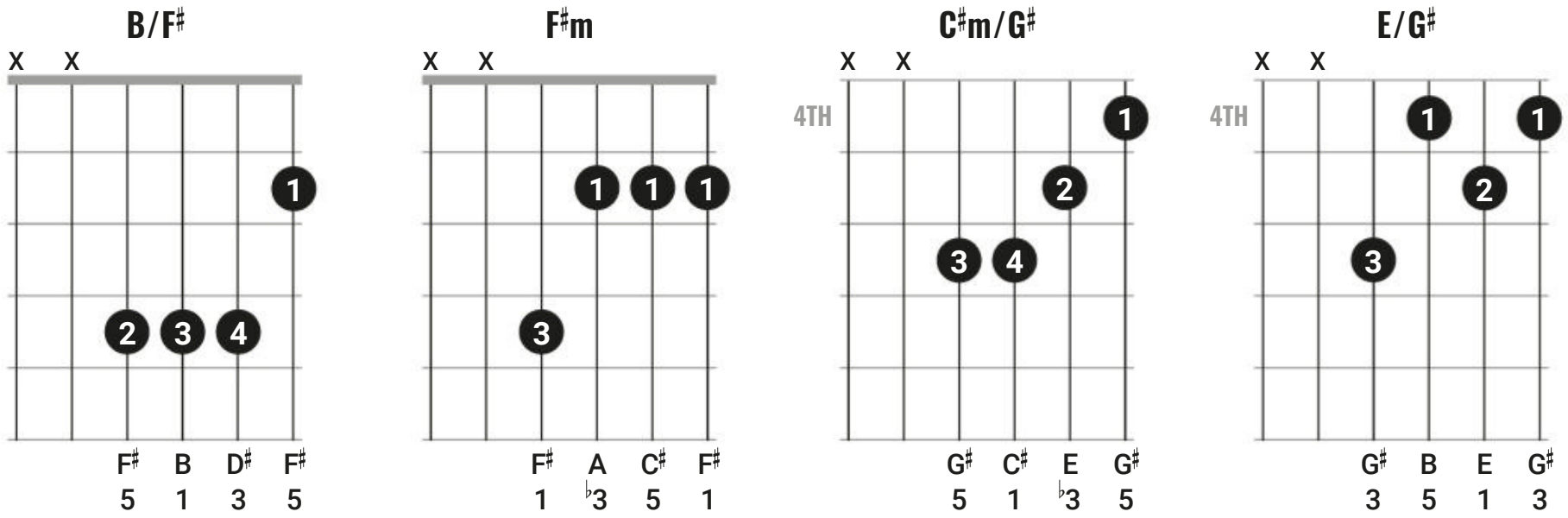


FIGURE 3

When rock 'n' roll arrived in the 1950s, it didn't wipe out the style of pop music that had been before. The Beatles had been used to listening to mainstream pop and hearing the extended chords that were a hangover from the jazz age. Here, we're inspired by a simple four-bar chorus, which settles on a different F major voicing when repeated. Minor chords with major sevenths are not exactly commonplace in rock and pop music.

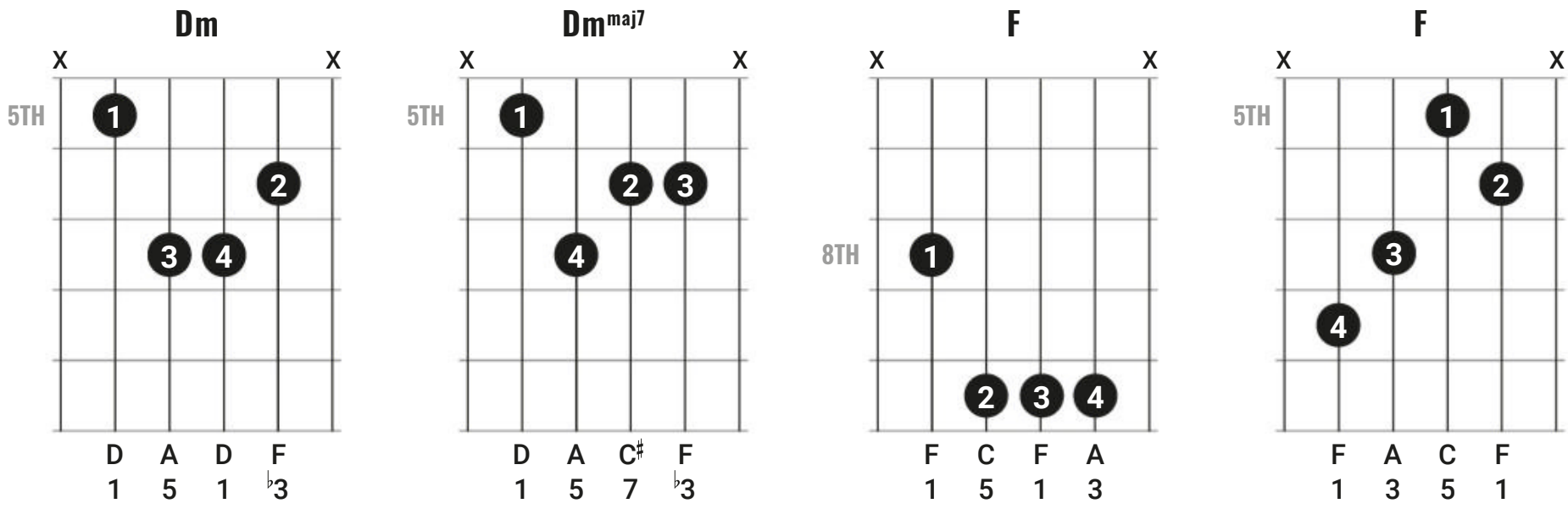
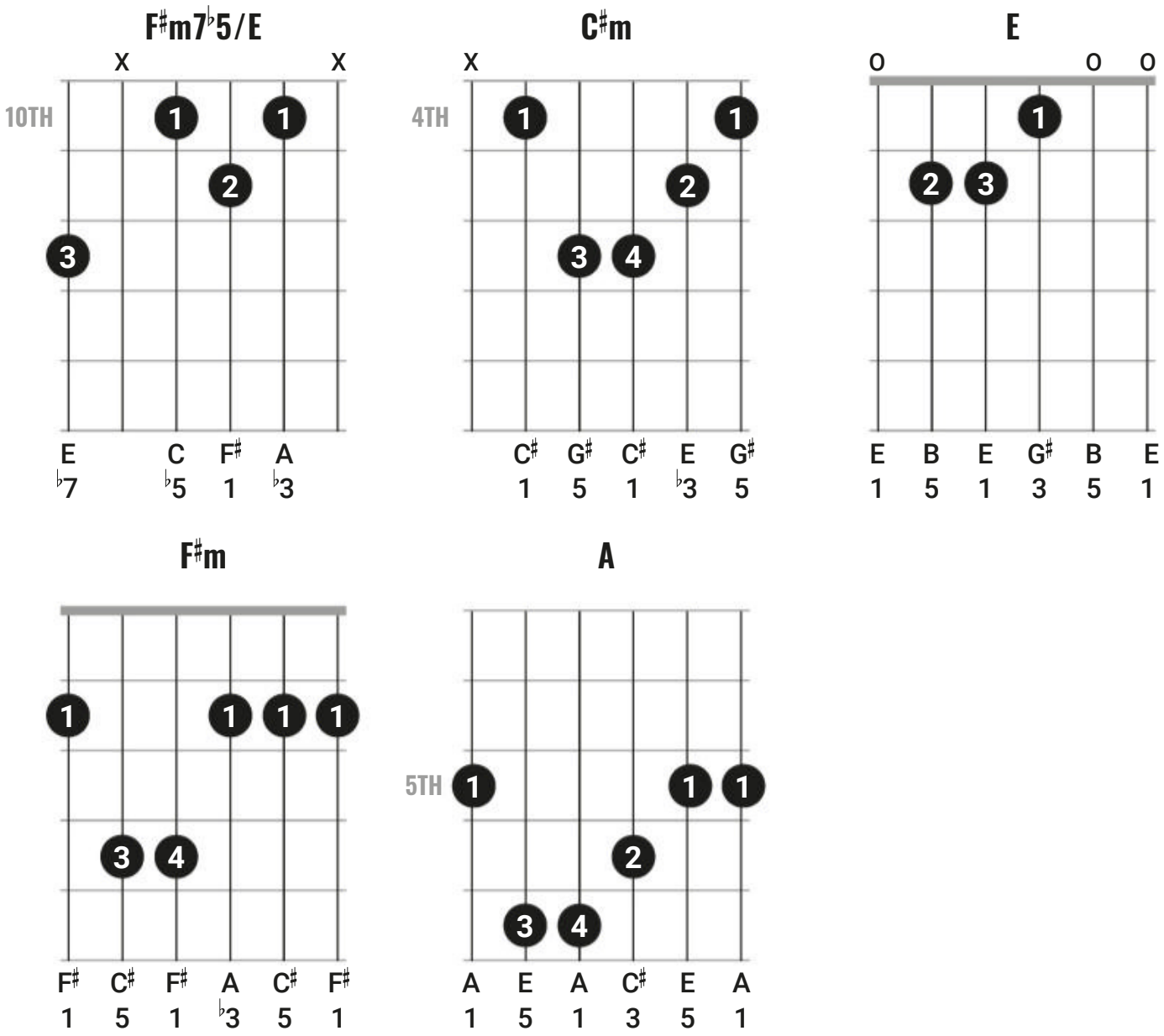


FIGURE 4

Whether it's the opening chord of *A Hard Day's Night* or the final chord of *A Day In The Life*, there's plenty of discussion about what exactly The Beatles played at various points in their songs. Here, we're using a Lennon-style composition where the opening F♯m7♭5 with E bass chord seems to have little to do with the chunky strummed chords in the verse that follows. Also, you might be surprised that, after going around the sequence a few times, it ends on E. As in figure 1, eight-bar phrases are also available, so experiment and see what you come up with. Returning to the first chord, here's some music theory before we bring things to a close: F♯m7♭5 is F♯, A, C, E, so the first chord in figure 4 is in third inversion, with the seventh in the bass.



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TALKBOX

DEVIN TOWNSEND

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Getting his break as the vocalist on Steve Vai's *Sex & Religion*, Canadian musician Devin Townsend went on to become one of the most respected musicians in metal. Here he talks how it all began, his reliance on delay and what he'd rather do than go to a gig

The moment it all started...

"The live *Victim Of Changes* solo from the Judas Priest album *Unleashed In The East*. There's a note KK Downing went for that immediately turned to feedback that grabbed me in such a way that I never looked back."

I couldn't live without my...

"Delay. It's an integral part of my style because it allows me to interact with my past in a way that now is a huge part of my process. I enjoy playing guitar to a certain extent without it but rarely write that way."

The one that got away...

"I tend to cycle through identities when it comes to writing and, once a phase is over, the guitar that was so significant at the time often seems 'empty' and I only hold onto it for nostalgia. I tend to be quite romantic with instruments only during the time I'm using them."

My signature model...

"I've had several. I worked for years with ESP, then Peavey, and now Framus and Prestige, and I've had signature models with each to some degree. Essentially, I tend to design guitars that suit my needs at the time. But fortunately, I was able to design my Framus Stormbender from the ground up, and it covers most of the things I could ever need in a beautiful way. The Prestige acoustic is called the Empath, and is a beautiful guitar as well."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

© Christie Goodwin

"I tune to Open C, so I typically retune it and start with a bunch of suspended chords and some lead patterns I tend to default to."

The best piece of advice I've ever been given...

"Forgive yourself."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"Most of my career, if I'm being honest. But forgiving myself tends to nullify a lot of that."

My guilty pleasure

"I have no guilt with what I listen to. I like a bit of it all to some degree. I have enough guilt in other parts of my life to more than make up for it though."

I'm in the band...

"Maybe Led Zeppelin for the symbiosis between players and the power they were often able to wield. But I also feel much of what they did and stood for would have maybe not worked for me in the long run. Maybe just recording with Bonham would have been cool."

I wish I was there...

"I hate going to gigs, I'd rather go to a restaurant, if that's okay?"

The first thing on my rider...

"Socks! Followed closely by a selection of fruit and vegetables for my trusty juicer."

If I could play one thing...

"If I were to narrow it down, probably jazz. I love it but it's all Greek to me."

Devin Townsend's *Order Of Magnitude – Empath Live Volume 1* is out now on InsideOut Music

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